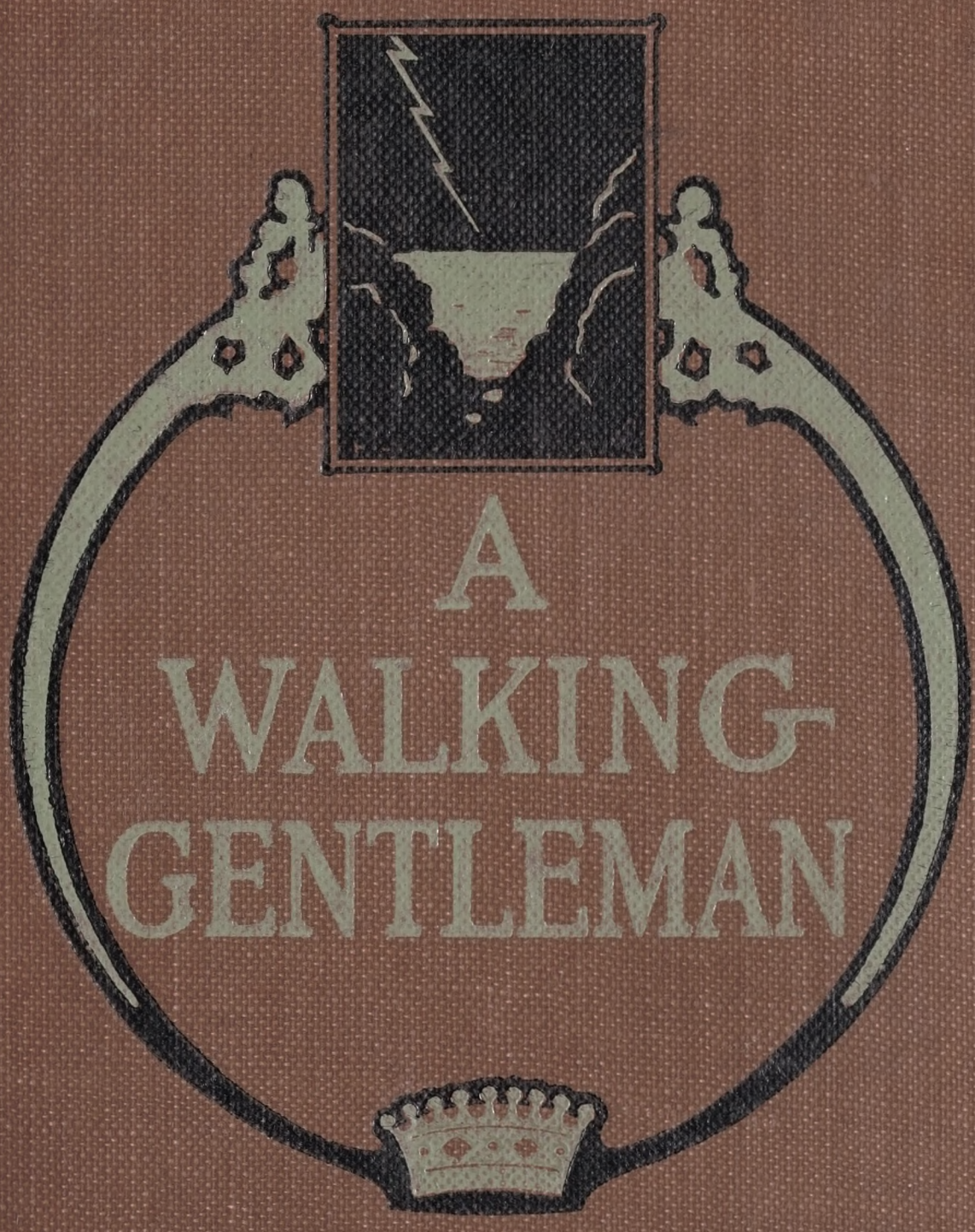


A WALKING GENTLEMAN

by

JAMES PRIOR



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A WALKING GENTLEMAN

A WALKING GENTLEMAN

A Novel

BY

JAMES PRIOR

AUTHOR OF

'FOREST FOLK,' 'RIPPLE AND FLOOD,' 'HYSSOP,'

ETC.

Solventur *ambulando* tabulæ

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A WALKING GENTLEMAN

CHAPTER I

OUT OF TUNE

"THE Duke of Highlow has sent us a cheque, Jack."

"H'm, his delicate way of presenting you with his autograph, I suppose. He knows you collect?"

"Won't you come and look at the presents that came in yesterday?"

"Please excuse me, Sally. I know I shall have to see them some day."

"No compulsion, Jack."

Lord Beiley was too polite to contradict, but it was depressingly apparent to him that a man who has allowed himself to drift within twenty-eight hours of wedlock is not a free agent.

"What's the matter, Jack? You seem very down."

"Unusually so?"

"Awfully unusually."

"Then I was mistaken; I thought I was just on a dead level with everything else."

"Thanks for everything else."

"If you'll excuse me, I'll take a stroll through the park until luncheon."

Lord Beiley turned from Lady Sarah Sallis, and passed from the tempered light of that great hall through the open door and out into the broad sunshine, with as despondent an unexpectancy as though he had been proceeding from one prison to another. Down the wide

balustraded steps he went with the even unelastic tread of unutterable boredom. A few slow paces across gravel and the shade of a great avenue of lime-trees came between him and the sun. Yet with a noble generosity they returned part of the light they took in broad shimmerings, delicate siftings, quivering flashes, that made the blades of the grass he trod seem things as airy as their own leaves that hung between him and the sky. If he had but seen.

It was Whit-Monday and the first day of June, when according to the almanac and proverbial wisdom all things are in tune. At least the songs of the birds were; the merry untiring roundelay of the chaffinch, the silvery tinkle or slender piping of the tits, the full-throated repetitions of the thrush, the poetic ecstacy of the lark, the far-off uncompetitive fluting of the blackbird. On either hand stretched the great undulating park, browsed by herds of deer, red and fallow. The sky visible but brokenly adown the mile-long avenue was in flawless gradation, from the robbed blue of the sun's proximity to the hazeless violet of the horizon. But to Lord Beiley, if he heard and if he saw, the sky was of one colour with the clod, the songs of the birds to one tune with his own sombre ponderings.

On the morrow he was to marry his old friend Lady Sarah Sallis, only child of the Earl of Hexgrove, the woman whom he liked best. He was not in debt, his liver was all right, he had never done a mean thing, he was not bitten by ambition, not depressed by obscurity; his vices were as inconspicuous as his virtues; he had neither done nor undone, neither failed nor attempted. And yet—and yet—if he could quietly have ceased to be, that moment, without the doctor, without newspaper impertinences or posthumous fuss, he would have welcomed the lapse even into nonentity as scarcely more arid and not so sorry as such an existence. And Lady Sally? Well, he had made his will so far as he could in her favour. And what more would she have?

He kept on walking, chiefly because to him who

stands thought comes with the more persistent attack. As one moves even in the solitude of a great avenue there is at least the crackle of a leaf or dry twig underfoot to claim the ear; or there is a mole-hill in the way, some little inequality that catches the toe and makes a momentary interruption of the brain's dull sequences; which in Lord Beiley's case would have been sad had they not been so altogether commonplace, passionless and selfish.

He passed under the great arch of the gateway and out into the public road. On the rising ground before him widely spread the new red houses, the spires and tall smoking chimneys of the great manufacturing town. He might have seen them before, at large from the terrace, by glimpses through the trees, but he did not; now he could only avoid the sight entirely by turning his back upon it, as he did. He walked in the opposite direction, sauntered, lounged, crawled; it is hard to hit upon a word vacuous enough to express the slow futility of his motions. The caterpillar crawls, but with an imperative purpose; the exquisite lounges, but with much self-enjoyment; lovers saunter, but to make the most of the sunshine. Merely to say that he went would be colourless enough but too businesslike. Well then, he crept—though even crept has a furtive superfluous colour of its own—crept under the park wall. A factory chimney peering over the brow of the hill, a villa staring redly spick-and-span from among trees of much older growth, might have proved to him that by turning his back on the town he had not quite done with it; but he was sensible of nothing outward but the annoyance of the heat and dust.

Nevertheless there was somewhere, somehow, somewhy, a cessation of that monotonous dead-alive alternation of left foot and right; for when he came out of himself he found that he had stopped, that he was looking at something, that he was being looked at. On the dusty road just in front of him was a brake full of people, a shabby dusty vehicle, horsed by four un-

matched screws, packed with dusty perspiring men and women, all evidently interested in themselves, their surroundings and him. Their easy laughter, the content that buttered their faces as with a sweat, their enjoyment of the dust and other inconveniences, their acceptance of noise for music and good-will for wit, were doubtless enviable, but the half-awakened indiscriminate supercilious gaze which he gave them back was too unshaped to deserve so definite an epithet as that of envy. Nevertheless it was evidently supposed by their good-natured self-satisfaction to be indicative of a longing to be of the party.

"An' why not, matey?" shouted one of them.

It was taken up by a chorus of treble, tenor and bass.

"Coom wee's an' welcome."

"Mek a bit o' room o' your side."

"Five an' six, includin' meat tea an' speechifyin'."

"Hutch up a bit furder, missis."

"Now, mester, if yo're coomin'."

"Shew yersen limber. Gie's yer 'and. Joomp in."

"Hooray!"

"Now, Sam Meldrum, whip up them theer thoroughbred cattle o' yourn to their three mile a hour gallop."

Before he had bălanced a "would" against a "would not," he had walked the half-dozen paces to the middle of the road, had put foot to the step, had been seized above either elbow by an ill-washed vigorous hand, had been lifted rather than helped into the brake, and with much squeezing, swearing, laughing and loud welcoming, in a mixture of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire dialects, had been forced into their midst and wedged tightly between a fat man and a fat woman.

"Thou's gotten a divorce, George, from t' oad woman at last," said a dark-haired sturdy rough-coated miner-like young fellow.

"Nay," said the woman, "it's me as has gotten the divorce; an' a jolly good riddance an' all."

"Nay, Harry, lad," said another, a little dumpling of a man, after he had measured with his merry eyes

Lord Beiley's slenderness of girth; "nay, i' my opinion the present difference atween George an' Liz is 'ardly enough for a divorce; call it a mewchal separation for the good o' the neebours."

Again they laughed, bass and a shrill squeal of treble.

"What price that red glass ring, matey?" said the young miner. "I shouldna mind haein' one like it mysen."

"I don't exactly remember," said Beiley.

"It 'ud be summat if thou could tell me to fifty pound."

"I couldn't."

They laughed again, and would have laughed more, but were just passing the hall lodge. The brake was stopped; each had to twist head and stretch neck, or stand and crane forwards in order to catch an uncertain glimpse of the park.

"It's a main big place," said a gaunt grey-haired dull-eyed six-footer; "it reminds me wonnerfully o' that'n wheer I were born."

"That must a bin the workus then, Stiff'un," said a stripling in black coat and hat, white flannel trousers and cricket belt.

"Ay, Peter," said Stiff'un, "it were; I'm not baugein' an' boastin' as if 'twere the county lunatic 'sylum."

Which, as the shouts of laughter testified, was considered a smart retort upon Peter.

As they got astart again a voice from the box bade them ask the counter-jumper if he knew who lived there. His lordship, gathering from a general chorus of personalities that he was meant by the counter-jumper, replied that it was one of the Earl of Hexgrove's places.

"Ah, yo're in wee'm, I see," said the dumpling of a man; they called him Poley.

"What do you mean?"

"Thick wee'm," said one.

"A pal o' yourn," said another.

"Sort o' know 'im intimate like," finally said fat George at his elbow wheezily.

"I don't know anybody intimately; do you?" said Beiley.

"Raythe r," answered George. "My missis t'other side on yer for example. Eh, Liz, don't I know yer? Ay, yo huzzy, that I do."

"An' I know yo, George; better nor well enough. I knowed yer well enough afore iver I'd spoke to yer."

"Ay, an' I know yer nagging oad mother an' all."

"Ay, an' I know yer scabby oad faythe r an' all. I know 'im well; well I know 'im."

"An' yer brother Jos, the swine."

"An' yer sister Betty. If Jim's a swine she's a besom. I've hed my ears open if I've kep my mouth shut."

"Yo're a fow-mouthed troll to say so."

"Yo're a black-'earted varmin to miscall our Jos."

Lord Beiley had grown uneasy at being as it were the conductor of their violent recriminations.

"Hadn't a broader gentleman better take my place?" he said.

Laughter broke up the quarrel.

"Coom, Liz, coom, George; this een't whissunning, this een't. Sattle it ower a can at the next pub an' save yer breath for the Sheffield 'andicap."

The next public-house was close at hand on the outskirts of the town, and there they stopped. There was another brake ahead of that in which Beiley was seated, besides some half-dozen bicyclists. They all had glasses round amid the lively artillery of gibe and laughter from vehicle to vehicle, crossed by the raking comment of cyclist and bystander on the pavement. Beiley had no liking for beer, but he took his glass with the others. He wished Lord Hexgrove had been driving by to see him; he, a man who had hitherto kept a perfect fastidiousness, the special virtue of his class. He felt a perverse pleasure in doing what offended his own sense of decency.

When all was drunk but much still unsaid, again they got astart, with whooping and shouting, and the

mingledy-pingledy music to any tune and no tune of a bugle, an accordion, a mouth-organ and a penny trumpet, supported by the singing of those who thought they could sing, and the shrill whistling of those who did not care to try. There was rising ground in front of them, but swerving to the right they skirted on the flat a manufacturing suburb, a residential quarter and an old castle-rock; then followed a crooked irregular cross-way and soon found themselves in the dingy thick of the town.

It was a small and shapeless open space formed by the meeting of several busy unattractive streets and alleys, and decorated on the one hand by a row of almshouses, on the other by two inns. They stopped at the latter and again loudly called for their half-pints and half-quarterns, Lord Beiley with the others; apparently he was suffering from thirst sympathetic. There was soon a crowd around them, by equal parts admiring and amused. Harry, the hot-headed young miner, from chaffing got to wrangling with the bystanders, and was particularly personal to a tall thin moustachioed man in his shirt-sleeves.

"Hark to me, stockinger," he shouted; "in our place the women use sich uns as thee to tie round their parcels o' calicker. They wouldna call thee a mon; they'd call thee a ha'porth o' twine."

The thin man took his pipe from his mouth and said:

"I see, surry; yo're—

> 'Derbysheer bred;
> Strong i' th' arm an' weak i' th' head.'"

The young miner uprose.

"I'm agooin'," he said, "to try my head again thy arm."

He was thrust back into his seat by the violent persuasion of half-a-dozen rough hands.

"Fie on thee, Harry," said Liz. "Is them yer manners? Coom! What'll the stockingers think to 's?"

Harry, convinced by the rough hands and the reason, immediately turned right-about-face to the extreme of good fellowship. He held forth his can to his antagonist on the pavement.

"Here, surry!" he said. "Ne'er mind what uz says; we're whissunnin'. Teem some o' this down into thy belly an' swell it out. A barrel on't ud mek a hafe-mon on thee."

The stockinger put forth his hand and drank with this sentiment:

"Here's luck to thee, lad; and if theer's anybody i' th' fam'ly with a saving o' sense, may 'e die an' leave it to thee."

The laugh was so general that Harry joined in without closely weighing the occasion of it. Nothing would serve him now but to blunder down the brake steps and with fervid vows of friendship shake hands one by one with the whole mob of laughing spectators. Then off they drove again amid a chorus of farewells, jovial, sarcastic, envious, amused. If one of Lord Beiley's friends could have beheld him thus his satisfaction would have been complete; he would have delighted in the cursory supercilious glance, the arrested eye, the sudden recognition, the irrepressible amazement. With the leisurely choice of an epicure he ran through the various names of kinsfolk and others whom he would have liked to encounter thus; haughty dowagers, flawless mashers, pompous legislators, belles of the ball-room, he ran through them all. Except Lady Sally; his thoughts kept away from her.

Boys and girls followed them shrieking and laughing, and shouting "Chuck uz a penny, mesters, chuck uz a penny!" Pence and ha'pence rattled on the stones, and the children scrambled for them, head over heels. Lord Beiley tossed them a handful of shillings and half-crowns. Helter-skelter flew the children; the brakes screamed with laughter; the miner gave the lord a disconcerting thump of approval between his shoulder-blades.

"Well done, counter-joomper!" he yelled; "thou's more droonker nor what thou seems."

"Thank you," said Lord Beiley, with a somewhat gaspy nonchalance; "but kindly favour another back with your next compliment."

Everybody laughed.

It was now the unanimous vote of the company that he was incomparably the drunkest of them all; but their admiration was genial. Over the uneven granite the ill-compacted vehicles bumped along. All smoked except the women and a little wizened barber who took snuff, and the rankness of the fumes filled the air. Beiley, whether in emulation or self-defence, lighted a cigar. The midday heat was doubled by the close contact of perspiring body to body. The cats' music of instrument and voice was going on all the while. Liz squealed into his one ear how hot she was, and that she'd a husband's sister's husband at Nottingham in the tuffey trade; George bawled into his other, enlarging incoherently upon his contempt for British generalship and his liking for pickled cabbage.

But at length they began to leave the stony town; the wheels merely rumbled a ground-bass to the uproar of the voices. On the one hand the flowery meadows were ripening into hay, on the other a tree-clad steep rejoiced to have once more escaped out of the death of winter; though marred, both fields and cliff, by a double pair of rails. The jovial company was loudly, even coarsely amused by two of the bicyclists; a woman enormously fat, with a face in a purple agony, always a long way behind, and a stolid heavily-built man of about forty, a collier with an imperfectly washed face, who rode for the first time. Every now and then he fell off, ran into wall, hedge or ditch, collided with a foot-passenger or fellow-cyclist. Amid boisterous jeers he immediately regained his feet; his dust-laden clothes bore an addition of dust; he made neither complaint nor apology, had neither smile nor frown on his grimy face; if anything, looked cooler than everybody else.

He remounted with the assistance of a laughing comrade, made a wobbling start, and presently after a devious run of uncertain length again came to grief. One speech he made at his fifteenth fall; both before and after which his mouth remained closed, a natural closure with no sign of constraint.

"Oi've peed ma money," he said, "for a whull dee; and for a whull dee oi mane to roide 'er. To-morrer onybody may hae 'er as loikes, for may. Oi'd sooner work unnerground for noat an' foind mysen."

They stopped to drink at Lowfields, a mushroom of a place sprung up round a railway junction. Here in consideration of three half-dollars and a half-pint the accordion passed into the possession of Peter, who spent the remainder of the journey in laboriously extracting discord from it. On either hand and in front of him sat as assessors a self-elected committee of inexperts, who seemed to think that a musical instrument is a sort of conundrum whose meaning is to be arrived at by a persistence in wild guess-work. They unnecessarily encouraged him when he was over sanguine, and fed his despair when he talked of chucking the fool of a thing into the hedge-bottom.

They stopped again, so hot was the day, a mile further on at Bardwell. It was their humour at these and other stoppages so to abridge their thirst, that they were ready to start again just as the fat lagging female bicyclist trundled up, panting and sweating. But they would not have gone above a furlong or two before some good-natured fellow or other would be sure to shout to the driver to pull up, would take out a flask and say:

"Here, oad gell! It worn't 'ardly jonnock;[1] no, it worn't. Here, drink a sup o' this. I lay yo've lost a stun an' a hafe sin last we seed yer. Afore we get to Welham yo'll be as thin as a lat."[2]

And so they waited while she sipped and recovered breath, bantering her the while in terms that were more humorous than refined. In a momentary silence they

[1] Fair. [2] Lath.

could hear a lark sing overhead, lost in the sunshine; below a ploughman called to his fellow in the next field. Beyond the range of their tobacco the air was filled with the fragrance of the hawthorn.

Still they drove down the river valley through Crifton and Clayton, with due stoppages of course. All the way they had on their left hand a line of dumpy hillocks often covered with wood; on their right level tree-besprinkled fields, fat meadows wherein sometimes the green predominated, sometimes the gold of the buttercup or the snow of the cow-parsley. And the foliage of the hedges hardly appeared for the abundance of bloom. The barber said:

"It looks like as if th' hedges was all hung ower wi' women's smocks an' children's pinnies."

They stayed the brakes for a while on the further side of Clayton, where a number both of the men and women got out to gather bunches of May, of herb Robert, lambs'-toes and red campions, laughing and playing together like children let loose. Beiley, who had remained sitting, said to the red-faced puffy butcher opposite to him:

"By the bye, where are we going?"

"To Welham," was the answer. "Do yer know it at all?"

"No."

"A nyst place. There's a cathedrial, a work'us an' a hafe-dozen good housen."

"Houses? Oh! half-a-dozen rests for the horses?"

"Yer needn't want to get no nigher."

"Them boys at the cathedal sings a treat," said the barber.

"I'm partial to a bit o' good music after a good blow-out," said George; "it seems to top it up, like."

"I've noat to say agen *good* music," said the butcher; "I've three darters as larns the pianner; but to my fancy, when y'ave put away as much as yer can eat an' drink, there's noat does yer so much good as a pipe o' bacca."

The blossom-gatherers got in again and wedged themselves into their respective places. Liz seated herself partly upon Lord Beiley's knee, accidentally of course. When they were fairly astart the young miner noisily called attention to it.

"George! look, mon! Wheer's thy oys? Shay's huggling the counter-joomper. Get angry, mon. Pull thy shirt out. Show's thy bad manners. Uz o' this side's aw of a bloosh to see't. Look at Bootcher Gilpin's face. Cut 'is throat, thou sluggard, an' smack her i' th' chaps."

"Ler 'em be, George," said Stiff'un, "don't be hoggish. Theer's enough meat on Liz to content yo an' 'im an' all, let yer appetites be what they will."

"Yo mun get a divorce on 'er to-morrer, George," said Poley, "an' marry the widder. She'll hae yer, I'll be bound."

"No, she wain't, Poley," said the widow, a blowzy forty-year-old, always laughing. "When she wants to marry again theer's a better man nor George a-coortin' on 'er."

"Who is 't, Peg?" said Peter; and "Is 't me, Peg?" said Harry and half-a-dozen others, while Peg laughed and laughed again.

Not a man nor a woman but had a branch of May in the hand or a sprig of May in the hat or cap, and for a little while the natural fragrance had the better of the tobacco smoke; for a little while by a caprice of humour the horse-play and laughter ceased, even Peter let his accordion be, and a certain seriousness settled on their faces. They ran through Bradeley, where the laburnums at the mill hung their blossoms down to the water, where every garden was a-bloom with flowers, and the road was thickly hedged on either hand with elm and chestnut and new-leaved ash, making delicious shade.

"Reelly, I could live in sich a place all my days," said the widow, her laugh refined to a chuckle.

"An' be buried by yonner chutch down among them green trees," said Poley with a half sigh.

"It smells diff'rent here to what it does unnerground, Davy," said Harry.

And a deep voice from a mouth out of sight answered, "It does that, lad."

"The fields is just like a pixcher wi' posies," said a little old straight-backed grey-haired woman, named Fan.

"I think I like to be in a hay-field among the sweet 'ay better nor oat," said Liz.

"But it een't allus 'ay-mekkin' even here, lass," said the six-footer.

"Just hark at that bird!" said Peter.

"What bird is't, I wunner?" said the barber.

A little bird that from the top of a tall elm soared into the air, then descended to its perch on outspread wings, singing all the time with an ecstasy of joy that disdained the changes of art; and hardly had it alighted but it soared again and sang again. One thought it was sky-lark, another thought it must be a ground-lark, another had never heard the like on't afore; and they stopped the rumble of their wheels for a few minutes under a spreading oak-tree that they might listen the better.

"What is't, Paley's Frank?" said George.

But Paley's Frank was listening and did not answer.

"It's beautiful!" said the widow out of a full heart, meaning not the song alone but the setting of it, the lush green and especially the unfathomable blue.

They drove on again, still commending the beauty of their surroundings till Fan said casually, for the sake of a change:

"'Ow 'ot yer do look, Liz! It ud melt taller just to look at yer."

Everybody gave a gasp all at once, and the heat which had hitherto been their amusement was felt to be unbearable.

"I don't look no more 'otter nor nubbudy else," said Liz, panting and resenting; "for I couldn't."

"Put yer 'and to my back," said the widow; "it fair burns; it ud toast bread."

"I'm ommost sweltered," said George.

"Sweltered?" said Peter, "that's not in it; I'm roast beef an' mustard."

"If thou'd said roast pig, Peter," said Harry, "thou'd a bin nearer t' mark."

"Nay," said Stiff'un, "there een't enough sward[1] on 'im for pig; I reckon Peter ud eat more liker a summat too oad for cawf an' not oad enough for cow."

The new swerve of the conversation opportunely brought them to the Flying Horse at Monckton, their next halting-place, where their speech was freer, their laughter louder, their thirst more fiery than ever. Again they started, again the poor panting she-bicyclist was left behind amid a chorus of friendly gibes. But then their course left the level road of the river valley, and began to traverse the low but steep hills which for so many miles had bounded their view to the north. The steaming horses found the gradient too severe for them; all the men had to get out and walk in order to ease them. The widow took full breaths and fanned herself with a not quite white handkerchief.

"I wish to anything yo men ud stop out," she said, "now y'are out; there'd be some comfort."

"Yer'd soon be out after uz, Peg," said Poley.

"Not i' this life, Poley, not i' this life."

"Then, b' leddy, it'll be sudden death, Peg," said Stiff'un; "there'll be no time nayther for a drench o' watter nor a sniff o' salts. So I'll say good-bye now, Peg, whilst there's time."

Solemnly he shook hands with her. The other men crowded round and did the same; some slapped her broad back, others pulled her head down to their lips and kissed her, she laughing all the while.

"Yo nummies," said Fan, "all Peg means by change o' life is married life. She'll non die whilst she can mug an' marry."

[1] Rind.

"Wish yer many 'appy returns, Peg," said Poley.

"Criky, lad," said Stiff'un, "there's plenty on's alive yet to sarve Peg's turn wi'out any re-turns. Them as her an' the doctor's put out 'n their misery, leave 'em i' peace."

"If I've nivver done nubbudy no more 'arm, Bill," said the widow, "nor what I've done yo, I'm a guiltless woman."

"I say noat again that, but I'm afeard o' th' future."

"Yo nedn't to be."

"M'appen not; but I'm like a woman an' a cow; she knows it's a cow but she's afeard it's a bull."

A second time the men had to alight. The youngsters began running against one another uphill, stopped half-way and threw themselves down on the banks, panting. The little barber was explaining to Lord Beiley that their outing had been promoted by the Watford Preservative Club, of which a good few of them were members.

"This isn't our grand yearly do," he said; "that's in August; it'll be summat like. Sir Thomas Saywell, M.P.'s promised to be present."

"So we're sure," said Harry, "ayther o' him or a letter o' 'pology."

"But as we gen'rally reckons to bring wer own appetites," said Poley, "that don't so much matter."

"But of what," asked his lordship, "is your club preservative? Apricots and——"

"Dear 'eart, no," said the barber quite hastily; "it's the priv'leges of the people we're banded to presarve."

"Th' 'ouse of lords," said Stuff'un, "the game laws, the dug tax, sickness an' poverty, an' all our other oad ancient charters."

"Why should you? Are you all members of the peerage and game preservers?"

"Not by no means."

"But one on's," said Poley, "is a game poacher. Wheer is 'e? Wheer's Paley's Frank?"

A unanimous pointing of nose or finger indicated a

little middle-aged man in a black coat, the quietest of the whole party, and next to the barber of the meanest presence. The only token that he heard was a further rounding of his shoulders as he trudged uphill, hands buried in pockets.

"Oi belave hay started t'oad cloob hissen, the cunning toäd," said Harry.

"That 'e did," said the six-footer; "'e reckoned up as if the game laws was repaled there'd be no more taste like about snarin' a hare anights nor limin' sparrers adays. Didn't yer, Frank?"

But Paley's Frank neither looked nor said.

"About what's the time o' day by your tunnip, counter-joomper?" said Peter.

Beiley looked at his watch and forgot to answer. It was past the time at which he had promised to meet Lady Sally at luncheon. He fell into a muse which lasted until they reached Welham. The first thing he did there was to telegraph an apology to Lady Hexgrove. His way of putting it—that he had been "unexpectedly called away"—was perhaps as near to the truth as in telegraphic civility he could have gone.

CHAPTER II

THE WHITSUNNING

It was then three hours to the time appointed for the "meat-tea," so after some slight bread-and-cheese-and-sandwich refreshment at the inn where they put up, the merrymakers divided to spend the interval according to individual choice. A good few of the uninventive or sedentary simply stayed where they were, and continued in more purposeful fashion the intermittent potations of the morning. Two or three of a literary turn, men and women, loitered about the precincts of the minster and desultorily deciphered inscriptions on the tombstones; while the obscure rumour from within of the chanting of many voices or the drawling of one made them feel as though they had encountered a half-day Sunday in the week. Some of the women, notorious shoppers, with one or two of the gentler of the other sex, walked the hot stones, discussed the prices in the draper's window, said they should die if they lived in such a quiet place, bought chocolate and munched it, and all the while kept asking the men with watches what o'clock it was. Three or four of the inexperts borrowed the accordion from Peter, who was heartily tired of it, and favoured the street with new renderings of old favourites, wherein "Abide with me" got inextricably involved with "Rule Britannia" and "Oh, Flo, why do you go?"

Two newly married couples and as many pairs of sweethearts stole away; the others went into a grass field two or three minutes' walk from the inn, where the younger of the women and those who were attracted

by them played at "bum-ball," a game in which the shouting and laughing predominated over the leg-exercise. The rest of the men, those who were not susceptible to feminine influence or who had as much as they liked of it at home, chose to play at cricket; but there was at first some difficulty in picking sides. Poley proposed a match between "the dotty and the all-there," but Stiff'un objected to its one-sidedness.

"'Twould be a match of me an' nubbudy agen ev'rybody else. Why not th' hen-pecked uns versus the residium?"

But all the married men save one oft-convicted wife-beater voted against him. The rash young miner said, "Let th' 'onest men plee the thaves," but was straightway suppressed by a general shout of indignation. Quoth Poley ambiguously:

"For we're all one sort."

The barber suggested "Tradesmen v. Non-tradesmen," but was snuffed out by the most important person among them, a prosperous general dealer, a stout person huskily fluent, in a black coat and a white waistcoat, which showed a good deal of a rather crumpled shirt-front.

"Let's 'ave no class distinctions," he said, "but what's in accordance with the laws and the statutes of the land. We're all either kings or lords or commons. Isn't that so? The law makes no distinction betwixt tinker and tailor as I know to. Isn't that so? Very well then, let's keep inside of the constitution of the country."

Harry again desperately proposed "Red noses agen white uns," but there was such a preponderance just then of the red as gave no hope of a fair match. A burly phlegmatic fish-hawker, who had hitherto hardly spoken a word, chose to see in the proposal a personal insult.

"Yer might as well say at once 'D-droonk agen sober.' I know when I've hed anough. I wish I c-could joodge mack'rel as well. Another pint an' I

shall a hed anough. Or a pint an' a hafe. Is that spoke clear? I don't reckon a hafe p-pint oat to a man wee a top to 'is 'ead. I'm joost the medum atween a watter-butt an' a swine. Is that plain sense? I ain't the man to brangle; I ain't the man to do noat wrong; I'm a good man. If a man dunno when 'e's 'ed anough, let 'im c-call for another glass. If yer keep a mack'rel while next Monday it'll stink like a t-teetotaler. Who's the fool now? The Bible says 'Wine's a mocker;' it don't say noat agen beer; it couldn't, truthful. What is there nyster for a relish nor a pennorth o' srimps? I'm fowerty-fower the fift' o' next month. I've never hed a tooth drored. I've never false-swore agen nub'dy. I'm own cousin to Mester Smith of wer mothers' sides. Now I'll goo, to save t-time, an' hae that t'other pint an' a hafe—or two pints."

He went, but not far; he fell over a form that stood across his way and did not rise again, but lay all his length unregarded, his feet in the shade of a wide walnut-tree and his bare head in the sun. The cricketers had at last come to an agreement. Harry, with the advantage of the first pick, was choosing sides against a professional cricketer with lathy limbs and glaring eyes set in a wooden face painted red, whose surname or nickname was Shortly. Lord Beiley and the barber were wanted to complete the sides, but both wished to be left out. Said Harry the miner violently:

"Yo'll ayther plee or way'll plant yer i' th' grund, both on yer, for t' wickets, wi' yer heads on for bails."

"I'd sooner play than give you so much trouble," said Beiley.

"I'll hae counter-joomper," said Harry; "I reckon hay's thray cans i' better fettle nor the barber."

The two men who professed to know nothing about cricket were compelled to be umpires. The pitch was a bit of ordinary grass-land kept short by the sheep. Harry's side went in first and fared ill. The professional's disconcerting alternations of swift and slow fetched the batsmen out like shelling peas, with a little

assistance from the umpires who were completely under the spell of his glaring eyes woodenly set. Until Harry himself went in fifth wicket down and with some wild terrific slogging—5, 3, 4, 7 (including 3 for lost ball), 4, 6 (all run)—quickly raised the score, while four successive partners at the other end in cricket-reporters' slang "compiled" three between them, including a leg-bye for two off the batter's head. The single was got in the slips by Peter, who presented the wrong side of his bat to the bowler, and next ball was out, caught by short leg off his hip.

The counter-jumper was sent in last amid much anticipatory merriment. His face was so white, his hands so delicate, his bearing so languid, that everybody was prepared for a girlish performance. He found that the ball got up nastily. Off the first three deliveries he had a life at the hands of the wicket-keeper, point and mid-on. Everybody laughed save the professional; he glared all round, but especially at the umpires; which so unnerved and confounded them that the one at the bowler's end shouted "No ball!" to the next just before it shot down the middle stump. Shortly wrangled, but Harry wrangled back with every variety of argument, from insult to his opponent's brick-dust complexion and reference to precedents indistinct through sheer volume of voice, to repeated offers either to "faight it out" there and then or to leave the decision to Storer. Shortly, perceiving that he had no superiority either in lungs or logic, and feeling besides cock-sure of the issue, suddenly closed the dispute, seized the ball and sent it swishing down the wicket before the fielders could get back to their places. It went off the batter's hand, a stinging blow, straight to Poley who was hurrying back to slip. Ordinarily a safe catch, he dropped it. Shortly swore, but compendiously, like a business man who postpones the deferrable to the urgent. He put all his thoughts and feelings into his next ball, whose pace was frightful, and it found Beiley on the left leg. Beiley set his teeth,

pulled himself together and determined to stop. Looking about him he took particular notice of point, who having at a beck from Shortly approached within two yards of his bat, had his eager hands ready for the catch and his mouth for the chuckle of success. The batsman cut the next, a short-pitched one, square and hard, straight at point's head and knocked him backwards. The fielder touched the ball with one hand but did not save his face. "Well troid at, surry!" shouted Harry as he got up; but that did not staunch the bleeding of his nose. He wished to retire to a safe fielding distance but was sternly forbidden by his captain, of whom the umpire at his own end privately inquired whether he could have given the batsman out for "nose-ending the fielder;" for which he was openly, insultingly and minutely directed the nearest way to the county lunatic asylum.

The following ball, the tenth of the over, being similarly pitched, was similarly treated, sprained point's thumb and went away for a safe single. Point obstinately rebelled against his position, and was relieved as well as offended by a rearrangement of the field, whereby Peter gave place to him at short leg.

"Yo'll hae noat to do theer," said Shortly, "but keep yer fingers boottered an' dodge the balls."

The bowler at the other end was methodical, straight, medium-paced and easy; the professional bowled faster than ever but without his head. The batsmen had put another forty on before Harry, lashing out at a shortish one, lifted it into the sky out of sight. Three or four fieldsmen made trembling preparations for muffing it; nobody knew where it was but Shortly. He rushed to the left, knocked down mid-off who stood in his way, and with one foot on firm ground, the other on the prostrate fieldsman's chest, brought off a wonderful catch. All out for 81 and but half an hour left for play.

"There won't be no toime to lick 'em," said Shortly; "it'll be nobbut a draw, an' be danged to 't."

"Can thee baowl, counter-joomper?" said Harry.

"No," said Beiley.

"Then thou mun holl.[1] Oi'll tek the top end, thou shalt tek the bottom. Ram in; baowl fast at their legs an' steady at their wickets an' we shall slate 'em yit."

Harry's first ball, a terrific shooter, sent Shortly's middle stump flying. The professional's only relief, after he had done swearing at the pitch, was to begin swearing at his team, and insult his best men by forthwith reversing the order of going in. It was indeed hard on him, for Harry hardly bowled another straight ball the rest of the innings; but the batsmen were cowed and he had it all his own way. He proved to be as fierce and random a bowler as he was a batsman; whether by gift natural or of the beer he had drunk. His pace was terrible; half his deliveries were wides, which the weary perspiring umpire only occasionally noticed; some never left the ground, some bumped up house-high. Every over he hit one or two of the unhappy batsmen on the body, and every time they were hit the umpire gave them out leg before. The squabbles were incessant. The umpire, intimidated by Shortly, gave but the more erroneous decisions; allowed Harry double the proper number of balls to the over, and once when four byes had been run said on appeal, "Wide! out!" It was furiously disputed whether the wides should be recorded or the batsman leave. Finally it was left to the other umpire's judgment, who, being desirous of conciliation and naturally of a cooler habit of body, decided that both the batsman should go out and four be added to the score. The professional delivered six formal challenges to "faight it out" to as many of his antagonists.

Meanwhile all Beiley had to do was to keep on trundling his "donkey-drops" at the other wicket. Harmless though they appeared, the unnerved batsmen could do nothing with them but scoop them up into the hands of the fieldsmen, who brought off about one catch in every six. So it was that in spite of the prolonged

[1] Hurl, throw.

debates there were still four minutes wanting to time when the last man went in. He had been straitly warned by Shortly:

"Stick yer bat i' th' block-hull, man, an' pray or oat as keeps yer from thinkin' o' th' baowlin', while th' oad fool of a hoompoire out 'Toime.'"

He did as he was told. Harry was bowling; his first was straight for a wonder, went off the bat into slip's hands and was dropped. Harry crammed all he could of his fury into the next ball. It rose like a demon and smote the batsman on the left elbow, a sounding thwack. Privately the umpire thought he was out, but having just then Shortly's last menace chiefly in his mind he said "In!" The batsman was going however, ruefully rubbing the injured joint.

"I've gen yer in, Tom," said the umpire.

"I know yo've gen me in, thank yer," said the batsman, "but I've gen mysen out."

He stoutly refused to go in again at the persuasion either of threat, jeer or argument, and so Harry's side won just on time by fifty-nine runs.

When they returned to the house noisily exultant or abusive, they found that all their comrades had come out into the street except those who remained glued to their seats, still capable of thirst but all their other faculties locked up. In the middle of the roadway a dark-skinned foreigner was playing a barrel-organ; a red-coated long-tailed monkey was perched on it, and beside it old Fan was dancing with remarkable agility. She had thrown her hat on the ground and the sun fell unmitigated on her head. Her face was of a purplish grey meagrely fringed with wisps of grey hair; her expression was serious, not sad; she held her hands akimbo and skipped round and round with little grace but much spirit to the tune of "The Soldiers of the King." The pavement was crowded with amused onlookers; the monkey hopped and gibbered; his fellow-artist who turned the handle smiled and smiled, indolently expectant of ha'pence.

Presently a white-headed labourer, solemnly drunk, Daniel Cutts they called him—he was the oldest of the party—stood forth on the other side of the organ, and began shuffling his heavy boots in simulation of the dullest and slowest of bear-dances. He held his trembling hands as high as his head, and lifting one foot and then the other in clumsy alternation turned him about this way and that. His friends clapped hands, laughed and shouted:

"Well done, Daniel!"

But soon a child pushed between the legs of the spectators and darted into the road, a little thing of no more than six. Taking her place between the beldame and old Daniel she capered with a natural grace, bare-headed, one tiny hand uplifted, the other daintily extending her skirt. She was poorly dressed, but had a gift of golden hair which the sun's rays shone through and through, being akin to it. The organ bleated "The Soldiers of the King;" the organ-grinder smiled on, as though he were too lazy to be either less pleased or more; the monkey gibbered and hopped; old Fan frisked it tipsily until the wisps of short grey hair stood off from her unvenerable head; Daniel slowly changed foot, apparently unconscious of the surroundings; between them the little child danced, light-footed and light-hearted; the bystanders laughed and shouted less and admired more.

But all at once as it seemed, the music ceased, the dancers stood still, the little child disappeared. The musician having picked up his pence, slung the organ on his back, the monkey clambered to his shoulder, the holiday-makers pushed again into the inn, the onlookers went their several ways.

CHAPTER III

THE USUAL TOASTS

THE meat-tea with its superabundance of wet and dry was a long affair. It might have been deemed impossible that persons with so much beer inside them could have entertained so excellent a thirst for tea; or while this was in course of satisfaction could have kept so insatiable and indiscriminate an appetite for pork-pie, plum-cake, pastry, shrimps and ox-tongue. The chairman, the general dealer, set them the example. But the meal, however much prolonged, came to an end at last, when there was still an hour or two left before the time fixed for their departure. Three or four of the men fell immediately and irrecoverably asleep. The remainder undid half their waistcoat-buttons, took out their pipes, very deliberately filled and lighted them, gave the busy waiters their further orders, and so prepared themselves either to talk or listen. Of the listeners there was perhaps one to every dozen of the talkers. The listening was somewhat somnolent, the talk confusedly composite. It was like a solo or soli accompanied by the intricacy of a much-divided chorus; provided that part-music has ever been written in which the soloists descant each in his own key discordantly to the others and to the chorus, which also has as many parts as executants, each differing from the others in pitch, tune, time and expression. One loudly delivered matter of a delicate domestic character, another discussed in the ear of his next neighbour the public rumour from Manchuria or South Africa; this man made a jest obscurely sportive, that commenced and recommenced an anecdote, or

perhaps several. Harry and Shortly hotly disputed about the last cricket match between Notts and Derbyshire; George was understood to be complaining that something of which he had overeaten was underdone; his neighbour laughed aloud at humorous conceptions which he tried in vain to communicate. The man opposite bewept a love disappointment which had befallen him a generation ago; a third wondered where wool would be in ten years; to whom concurrently a fourth was elaborately explaining the advantages of budding over grafting, while a fifth doubted between himself and the table whether the boom in bicycles would make up for a falling lace-trade; a sixth sang, a seventh swore, but whether generally or particularly the man who listened to him—he had a man who listened to him—did not gather. Above and amid all which the women squealed, squeaked, chattered and whispered about babies and other ailments, about dress and what they liked best for dinner, about the deficiencies and redundancies of the absent. Everybody did just as he liked, which had a disgusted attraction for Lord Beiley, who had been exclusively used to a society in which nobody did as he liked.

Every now and then the chairman or some other person of strong ambition and good lungs attempted, one at a time or by twos and threes, to address the general ear about the education question, about a miraculous cure for squint, about the latest squabble in the church choir, about a wonderful pup, a funny dream, or wherein taxation and protection differs from protection and taxation. Meanwhile the smoke settled in clouds among speakers and listeners, and the waiters went to and fro taking orders.

At intervals one or another of musical celebrity obliged the company. Some listened, some applauded, some supported the singer with their voices, some talked about their fondness for music. A flushed tenor with an excellent voice but defective production gave them the "Death of Nelson," a bass and baritone a

rudely vigorous rendering of "The Wolf," somewhat marred by an ill-connected accordion obbligato by Peter. Up-to-date music was represented by "Dolly Gray," sung by Peg in a reedy voice oppressed, almost suppressed, by pork-pie and the day's etceteras.

"Y'ud a missed summat if y'adn't a heerd that," said the barber to Lord Beiley.

"I should," said his lordship to the barber.

Twice or thrice the chairman, after much rapping on the table to clear a way for his own voice through the press of voices, rose and proposed the usual loyal toasts, first affirming that they needed no recommendation from him and then at length recommending them. They were honoured by such of the company as were penetrable to outside influence in hearty draughts of whatever liquor stood before them, Burton brew or Scotch distillation, hot with or cold without. Finally he begged to submit to them a toast which would equally appeal to them as men—or ladies—and citizens. He called on them to drink to the bulwark of their religion, the banner of their liberty, the saving-grace of their noble constitution. He alluded of course to the 'Ouse of Lords. And so with uncompressed fluency he desired to include in the compliment the name unknown of one who yet they were proud to call an acquaintance, a guest, might he say a friend? Here those who understood the least were loudest in their permission and applause. He pointed to a gentleman who, he was given to understand, no doubt on sufficient authority, was in a state of acquaintance if not intimacy to one of the noble peers in the immediate county. He asked leave therefore in calling on them to honour the 'Ouse of Lords to couple with it the name unknown of the gentleman on his right, three from the bottom.

With the help of the chairman's fat finger, cries of "Counter-joomper!" taps on his shoulders, slaps on his back, nudges in his ribs, Beiley was made to take it in that he was the person thus honourably designated. He uprose, none too clear in the head, one of fifty at

a table; but immediately on his rising he came into distinct vision, bodily and mental, of his situation. Through air thick with smoke, foul with the breath of their mouths and the sweat of their bodies, he saw a number of faces about him variously distorted by laughter, all drink-flushed, all sensual, some reduced to a drivelling idiocy or a sullen apathy. Half-a-dozen of the men leant back against their chairs or forward upon the table in diverse invertebrate attitudes, mere carcasses. The widow had her head in her lap and snored like a gorged sow. His disgust was complete, with himself and them. Nevertheless he spoke, deliberately, in a voice subdued yet clear.

"Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, for myself and on behalf of the others included in this compliment I thank you. How we've deserved it, I don't exactly know."

The "Hear, hear's" and "No, no's" were about equal in volume.

"You, sir, were good enough to compare us to a sheet anchor. I don't know what a sheet anchor is."

"It's a way of talking," said the chairman huskily.

"A dry-sheet anchor," said Poley, "is the oppos-ite to a wet-blanket anchor."

"If it means a very untrustworthy sort of anchor, I think I may, with thanks, accept the compliment."

"What dost mane, counter-joomper?" cried Harry. "Thou'rt gone dotty, mon."

"You don't appear to me, sir," said the chairman, "to be speaking to the question."

"Ler'im be," said George. "The lad's hed a sup; that's all."

"He has the makin's of a cricketer," said Shortly defiantly.

"Damn all politics," said the butcher.

"But ourn," said one of the umpires.

Lord Beiley coldly put the interruptions by.

"When I go down, sir, to the place which you've so generously panegyrized, I go simply because the

bore of life seems a little less after the bore of legislation."

Probably nobody quite comprehended; none the less all disapproved. Perhaps the difference of his speech and manner made that resented which would otherwise have passed. One or two of the sleepers heard amid their drenched dreams a rumour of unacceptable doctrine, and snorted dissent. Others made utterance more or less articulate, as nearly all together as possible.

"Stosh it, counter-joomper!"

"Freeze up!"

"Talk o' summat else!"

"Sit thee down, lad!"

"Yo mun larn to carry what yo've took."

"Ne'er mind 'im, 'e don't mean the hafe o' what 'e says."

"No more o' this blether."

"Too much on't a'ready."

"Let the lad hae his say."

"Ay, hear both sides an' 'tach yersen to nayther."

The women refrained from the demonstration. Their politics consisting mainly of pork-pie and beer, they did not see why anybody with a practicable thoroughfare to an effective stomach should not be of the right way of thinking.

"Why can't they be quiet?" said Liz. "I declare I ain't heerd niver a word yit. I think 'e speaks beautiful."

"'E's very nyst looking," said the butcher's wife. "I do like that way o' partin' the 'air in the middle."

When the outcry had diminished to an undividable murmur, Beiley continued as though unconscious of the interruption. What he had drunk had added a quarrelsome ingredient to his blood.

"When a person allows himself to be promoted from the Commons to us, he is said to be kicked up-stairs. Some of us have no voice in the matter. Little peers are born with the marks of destiny's hob-nailed boots on their tender little persons."

The chairman rose to order. He regretted they had admitted into their ranks a radical in the disguise of a gentleman. They could usually see the difference with their eyes shut. In this particular instance they had been 'oodwinked. He implored the company to remain calm; he was resolved to do his duty. He called upon the speaker either to resume his seat or disresume his rabid revolutionary talk. To which Beiley replied by fixing his eyeglass. The glassy stare angered even those who would have been invulnerable to argument or abuse. There was a general exclamation against his attitude, whether under the name of cheek, side, splauge, harragance or snotty pride. The men uprose, all who were capable of the upright position, save only the barber, who was a man of peace, and Shortly, who never got excited over anything of less moment than a game of cricket.

"Don't employ unnecessary violence, gentlemen," said the chairman; "that's a very good quality suit."

Harry took him by one arm, Davy by the other, and led him forth, the rest crowding after and adding the impetus of their united weight. Harry kicked the shins of one who got his knee on too free terms with the peer's hind-quarters.

"Hay kep his end up whilst oi made th' runs. Oi wunna hae him tantoozled."

No further violence was offered, and no insult but the accompaniment of their laughter. Their good-humour had been restored by the ease of their victory. So they thrust him along the passage and out into the open, then retreating left him there. A rough hand, but not unfriendly, clapped his cap on his head hind-before. He went a few yards up-street, then stood. His expellers had gone back into the inn. The sweet cool evening air contrasted as strongly with the defiled atmosphere which he had just left, as that uplifted sky did with the room's low ceiling, dingily papered. The ancient minster sternly fronted him; its two grey towers were like two hands raised in prayer. The few shops

had their shutters up. Down the street boys and girls were playing at tickey, but at such a distance as put the proper hush upon their noise.

From within he heard the loud complacent laughter of his late comrades, and the grating of their chairs, the shuffling of their feet on the gritty floor as they took their seats again. His outwardly directed wrath was qualified by an inward dissatisfaction, as though he were vaguely conscious that his time would have been spent even more futilely, if less grossly, with his habitual companions; that he had that day got closer to men than he had done for many a day, not more physically than spiritually.

He walked up the street. If only he could have walked to an end, sudden, abysmal! Yet his was not the despair, sometimes heroic, always respectable, of a soul thwarted by circumstance; it was the despair, meaner by far, of a soul coddled by circumstance. The fondness of the mother may be more pernicious than the harshness of the step-dame.

He saw neither the houses, which he soon left behind, nor the trees, nor the division of the road. Only once he looked out of himself; he was on a hill; the sun's level rays smote directly upon his eyes, and it was the physical trouble perhaps which roused him. The luminary was about to set, apparently in undiminished radiance, but as he looked, a black cloud stole in from the west and blotted out the red glory. At the same time a secret shiver disturbed the warm contentment of the air. He walked on, but more slowly. The cloud in the north-west grew. A variable uneasy wind arose and lifted the dust. There was still light enough for a man to see his way and do his work by, but the gladness of the day was at an end.

CHAPTER IV

TURN TO THE LEFT

THE light of the half moon, as yet only threatened by the gathering clouds, had begun to predominate over the daylight. He was going downhill, when he heard wheels behind him, the grating of a brake pressed hard and a babel of voices, singing, shouting and laughing. He walked aside while the vehicle passed, the two vehicles as it turned out. The first went by without recognition, but from the second he was hailed by a voice, by various voices, amid a chorus of laughter.

"Why, it's the counter-joomper!"

"It's his lordship, sure-ly!"

"Art walkin' to t'ouse o' lords?"

"Joomp in, matey, joomp in."

"Can't yer see 's, lad? Then stick yer eye-glass in yer eye."

"Stop yer double pair o' jackasses, Sam Meldrum; theer's a lady to git up."

They stopped the brake just at the foot of the hill.

"Thank you," said Beiley, "I don't think you're going my way."

"We turn to the raight for the Mansfield road."

"I turn to the left."

"Ourn's the gainest[1] for Nottingham."

"I'm not going to Nottingham."

"Well, iv'rybody knows his own business."

"Except Gos'awk Goodyer as on'y knows iv'rybody's else's."

"If thou'st ony fault to find wee 's theer's me an' the barber, ayther on 's ready to gie thee the satisfaction of a faight."

[1] Nearest.

"Thank you, I'm quite satisfied."

"Shake honds then an' part friens."

Beiley shook indiscriminately a number of hands that were put forth to him; hot mostly, but some moist, some dry, some lean and some plump, some rough, others smooth and tailorish, but all hearty in their grip. Good-night was said and said again with lusty good-fellowship. The vehicles moved ahead. The hubbub of singing and shouting voices, the laughter and the cornet, grew fainter to the foot-goer's ear as he walked after it without haste. For why should he hasten? In a few minutes he came to a cross-road. The lights of the brakes twinkled faintly to the right; he turned to the left as had been inevitably shapen for him by the Lachesis of a lightly-spoken word.

The rising wind blew from the north-west. The moon shone on his right and wrote at length across his path the shadows of the wayside trees, which every now and then were blotted out as a black grey-edged cloud for a short time intercepted the light. The change from light to dark may have coloured his thoughts, it did not influence their shape. Twice he was met and passed by a wayfaring man. To the first, who bade him good-night, he gave no reply; the second did not speak and his ear seemed to expect and miss something. Thrice he went the length of a considerable village; but his eye made no distinction between the ranked hedges and the irregularity of the houses. At the last village everybody was abed. Gradually the disorder of his thoughts was, not arranged, but lulled by the rhythmic repetition of his footsteps. And all the way he had the moon upon his right.

But there came a time when by a slow change he had it at his back, and the grey road was peopled by no shadow but his own, extended before him like a grotesque egoism. He went on until the action of his brain became as merely mechanical as the action of his legs. And yet through his eyes it must have had a certain outlook, for by degrees he became more than

passively aware that on his right hand, running parallel to the road on which he walked, was another pathway only separated from it by a narrow strip of dark; a pathway not dully invariably grey like his own, but inhabited by a multitude of moving shimmers, of darknesses that came and went. He stood still; for the first time he looked back. The moon overhung the glimmering way and was reflected in it, with such a reflection as the terrestrial may offer of the celestial, broken, confusedly multiplied, disquieted, dimmed.

There was moreover a sound of running water, a sound which seems in the night-time like the proper accompaniment of tears. He knew that the shining pathway was a river; he did not know what river. On the other side of it was the black outline of a tree-clad steep. The wail of the wind among the trees reached his ears and the short quick sobbing of the water was unceasing. He felt a certain obscure relief when at a ferry the road swerved abruptly to the left and quitted the river's brink.

He was again passing through a village. He had to leap out of the way of a furiously-driven trap packed with half-a-dozen noisy revellers. Thus aroused he for a time walked more briskly, had the conscious use of his eyes and distinguished between the houses and the trees. His attention was caught by some black lettering staring in the moonlight out of a white ground, "Elham Post and Telegraph Office." It made instant reconnection between himself and what he had broken from. He knocked loudly at the dark door of the house until a man's head was put forth from the window above.

"What do you want," said the man, "this time of night?"

"I want to send a telegram."

"You can't; the office closes at seven. Besides we're all in bed."

"I'll pay anything you like, but I must send," said Beiley like a man sure of his argument.

"I'm not obliged to, you know," said the post-master.

However he withdrew his head, and after a little delay came down-stairs. The telegram was written and accepted; to the best-man of the morrow's bridegroom, Gerald Beiley, Hotel Robinson, Nottingham. For the minute Beiley had been again a man of the world; but when once the stamps had been stuck, the money passed, the door shut, that strange sense of detachment again visited him. On he walked with only this point to his aim, that it was impossible for him to turn back—yet. The moon sank low in the west; the light grew less and less.

Again his perceptions rose to the surface. A heavy shower had come on, and he felt the spattering rain on his left hand and cheek, heard its muttered roar among the trees. It was a rest to him for the time being to be less conscious of the aimless gyrations of his mind and more of his bodily fatigue. It was a break in his solitude to feel the companionable buffeting of the storm. He noticed it when presently it beat upon his right side instead of the left. He must have turned sharp with the road, albeit unawares. But soon the rain passed; he again left minding what was without. Again the clock was at a stay. Time had but one mode, a present vacuous yet perturbed, a present indistinguishably one with a sorry past, an undesirable future.

By some process which was hardly sight, he became aware that he was again skirting the river. He was walking along a high walled bank, lined upon his left with houses, blank-faced, lightless, lifeless. Below flowed the stream, on the far side of an unvarying blackness, on the near of a mutable blackness, sparsely flecked in the midst with grey and broken lights, appearances and disappearances, ghostly glimmerings. The clouds came on anew and clean wiped out the remnant of the moon. It was hard to believe that that murky flood had ever sung to the sun. The houses ceased, and soon river and road again parted company. By chance he

looked up, and in a transitory gap between cloud and cloud saw hard by the zenith a star, one inconsiderable star, a mere point of light in an abyss of blackness. So long as it continued visible he stood and gazed at it.

The man is not alone who goes into a solitude with all his conventions about him; he is surrounded by a whole world of onlookers. But there had been a breach made in that perfect fastidiousness of Beiley's which is the stamp of his clique. He had got a little way, if but a little way, apart; he felt alone.

The star was covered; he moved on. The road was always on a level, and at intervals of a mile almost exactly spaced there was a small village or hamlet; but these were stiller than the hedged lane, where the gusty wind with an ever-changing voice, weirdly eloquent, roared, whistled, howled, moaned, sighed, whispered to tree and bush. Moreover every now and then a shower fell and added another sound, a many-toned concert of murmurs, one to every leaf of tree and blade of grass; so different from the monotonous mechanical complaint of the rain on slated roof or stony pavement. These differences Beiley could not appreciate, and yet, being in a measure alone, he may nevertheless have been impressed by them.

He must have lapsed into that kind of colourless muse, in which what is without has the same visionary semblance as what is within; for thrice in a quarter of a mile he passed on his left hand a tiny clump of fir-trees, but just visible against the clouded sky, and he could not say whether it was reality or the repetition of a dream. But a fourth such clump being on the right made a slight awakening difference. Or if anything more were wanted to prove to him that he did not sleep, the rain again came on. He was immediately aware that the large wind-driven drops did not fall on his right hand with the same unresonant patter as on his left and about his feet, but with the manifold plop of water pelting down upon water. It was the river again. He

could just see over the low hedge the inconstant division of its wan shudderings from the dusky solid bank. He turned his head to what was before him and walked on.

Soon the river once more broke abruptly away and was lost to sight. He wished to make the parting final. He was not a timid or nervous man; he had willed his renunciation of superstition to be complete, whether the survivals of ignorance, the conventions of religion, the ingenuities of science or the fabrications of a prurience whose creed is its amusement; nevertheless to the primitive part of him, insuppressible however overlaid, those sombre recurrences were as an obscure prophecy of evil. There would seem to have come to him an inkling of an unfathomable terror underlying that film of assurance which was all he had to go and stand and build upon. He came to a meeting of roads and there turned sharply to his left.

The moon had set unseen; the swift black clouds fought for the sky unequally with a few faint stars. The sense of the universal largeness and the ego's littleness, if we have it at all, is more insistent by night. The vague aloofness of the horizon, the exiguity of yon star that quivers on the very verge of nothingness, the solitariness of the man who looks up at it, increase his aptness to be impressed. The differences of shade are on a large scale, without elaboration. Single trees are lost in the mass of wood; except that one hard by which hugely overhangs and menaces. What carpets the earth is merged in the earth itself. There is nothing small but this one insignificant being, the centre and pin-prick of the universe.

Turning and turning again he quite lost the sense of direction, and in about half an hour's time came upon some tiny fir-clumps, three in succession upon his left. He could not restrain himself from the prickly shiver that for a moment invaded his skin. He knew that he had returned upon his steps, that a little further and there would be the fir-clump on his right, and then once more the dark river.

So it was. There was so little light to see it by that its appearance was merely spectral. He went by. Ahead he heard the pants of a laboured breathing, saw something like a fiery serpent flying low; the lights and sound of a distant passenger train. He came again to the cross-roads; he did not choose his way; he had no longer any hope of avoiding the inevitable. He heard a bell behind him, he stepped aside; a bicycle and its rider sped by without breaking the loneliness of the night, and were quickly, light and all, out of view.

It was the darkest of the night; the rain again fell, the clouds completely held the sky. They let through barely enough thrice-sifted light to distinguish the sky-line of the humble house-roofs—he was among houses again—from that of a little low-towered church. A white tombstone showed, and but just showed, ghost-like, as if by its self-light, over the churchyard wall. He knew at the same moment that he again had the river for companion. He could not see it; the voice of its complaint was just then swallowed up in the bluster of the wind; but he recognized somehow that something on his right darker than the clouds, darker than the path before him, darker than hedge or house-wall, that mere abyss. He could not away with it. It must be remembered in his excuse that he was suffering reaction from his late alcoholic excitement; that his mind had been shaken by a continued agitation, his body weakened and his spirit dulled by a prolonged exertion. Yet he was afraid to be so much afraid as to go back; he groped rather than looked for a gap in the fence or wall that was on his other hand. Soon he found one, turned away and escaped—that is the word—up a narrow alley.

He had been afoot some six or seven hours; the numbness of fatigue came upon him; he continued to walk, but like a mechanism. His road now lay alongside a great railway. He heeded the violent hurry of the trains out of the silence, into the silence, as little as the rain which came and went, and the wind dried it

in the road and on his coat. One bird after another took his head from under his wing, stirred, shook his feathers out and began according to his gift to chirp or croak or sing. The grey of the eastern horizon slowly paled.

The whizz of white wings so close as to seem like the menace of a blow made him look up. He heard the shriek of a sea-bird; but the first thing he saw was the river at his feet, wan and cold. The sun had not yet risen; the pride of his courage was broken; he turned back. In a minute the path went behind a building which stood upon the banks. As soon as he lost sight of the river he forgot it, forgot everything but his utter weariness. He walked with his left shoulder grazing the wall and turned as it turned; so coming round a second corner to a doorless doorway he went through it, stumbling over the broken threshold into a sort of room. He was sensible of the shelter from the chill breeze. He looked about him with half-awakened eyes. There was no seat or couch but a heap of rubbish in a corner, dust and straw, the waftage of the wind. He lay down on it, sank back and was immediately asleep.

CHAPTER V

THE WEDDING DAY

He awoke shivering and aching, but his sense of bodily discomfort was immediately lost in bewilderment. By inconsecutive bits, like the disarranged parts of a puzzle, he pieced together the doings of the day before, while he considered his present surroundings. He was evidently in the long-disused furnace-room of some kind of works. The rude ceiling was shattered; he could see into the chamber above, which held a great rusty boiler, and up to the roof, through the rifts in which the sun peered. He had a painful bruise upon his left hand, he could not remember how gotten. He walked stiffly out into the open air. He stood on the broken stones of a grass-grown courtyard, flanked on one side by a high wall, on the other by ruinous buildings of red brick, a steam-mill apparently. Its chimney had fallen; through the gaping windows he saw rank upon rank of machinery which stood and rusted. Above the broken roof a great number of squealing swifts skimmed and wheeled, or darted in and out by the windows; their wings appeared extremely black against the grey-blue of the sky. He went forth by a doorless doorway past a dismantled windmill which stood apart from the rest of the buildings. That bruise upon his hand still puzzled him.

A couple of barges were moored to the river bank and men were unlading gravel from them and carting it away. He was surprised that the day appeared so well advanced. He took out his watch, in doing which he again caught sight of his damaged hand. Forth-

with he remembered everything; before he had seen the time. It was four o'clock; the hour appointed for the wedding. The shock of it, the infamy, the horror of it for the time stunned him. When he had recovered a little he went down to the men at work in the barges and asked if there was a telegraph office at hand. One man thought he could telegraph from the railway station, another said he would have to go to Croby post-office; he was in Arby parish. How far off was the station? Better nor half a mile. And how far Croby? Not above a mile the gainest road, by yon foot-pad. The gain of a few minutes seemed all-important; he went off towards the station the way that the man's finger pointed him, at a walk that had the hurry if not the speed of a run.

So he hastened with nothing active in his mind but an eagerness to be there, until he was there, at the very gate of the station. Then he stopped dead. What was he going to do? Patch up a rent in his honour with a sixpenny telegram. The attempt appeared ludicrous to him; he parted his lips for the laugh, but the laugh did not come. A rent? His honour was in tatters, it was scattered to the winds. The horror proper to the occasion was there, but was confused by a medley of other feelings less proper; of recklessness, relief, contempt, and a sense almost amused of the smallness of Lady Sally's loss; of a merely physical weariness and an indolent appreciation of the tedium of the necessary explanations. His eagerness fell at one drop to the numbest indifference; except to his hunger, and especially to his burning thirst. He turned from the station gate to the door of the adjacent inn, entered and ordered the best of what they could at short notice lay before him. He ate and drank heartily—as a rule his appetite was but small—and enjoyed thoroughly and deliberately the slow sucking of a fine-flavoured cigar. He slept there that night, retired early and slept soundly. Usually he went to bed late and slept ill.

He breakfasted too unusually well on common fare, paid his bill and was going. He had succeeded in avoiding alike the labour of a regret and the trouble of a forecast. As he passed the tap-room door the landlord, who was within, thanked him and bade him good-day. He stopped in the doorway to make the briefest of replies, at which moment a little grimy unkempt wizened fellow, who sat by the door with a drover's staff between his ragged knees, was saying in the deepest and most solemn of voices:

"I wunner what sort jacket a Norfolk jacket may be."

"I believe I have one on," said Lord Beiley, taking himself to be addressed.

Each occupant of the tap-room turned his eyes on him: the drover, the landlord, heavy, dark-complexioned, taciturn, a postman in uniform, weather-beaten and elderly, and a stumpy red-faced man, a small farmer it might be, with a newspaper in his hand. The latter went on reading, and the eyes of the others were withdrawn towards him.

"'A Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers and cap of grey tweed, ribbed woollen stockings to match and laced boots. He is five feet eight inches in height-th, of slight build, twenty-five years of age, of a pale complexion and wholly shaved. At the time of our going to press nothing whatever had transpired as to the cause of his lordship's disappearance. Lady Sarah, we are informed, is bearing the unfortunate contree-tempse with admirable fortitude.'"

Beiley stood on the threshold. If he was pale ordinarily he was paler then.

"Well," said the postman, "if them's the manners of our haristocracy I don't think a deal to 'em."

"Nor me nayther," said the landlord.

"Twenty thousand pound per annium!" said the drover with half-witted solemnity. "Free from all incumbers. What sort things is them?"

"Cowcumbers, Johnny," said the farmer with a laugh.

"Wi' that plenty o' money," said the drover, "if he wanted cowcumbers he might a bought some, or any other comfort."

"Perhaps," said the lord moodily, "he was tired of comfort."

"Then he moot be soft," said the drover; "as soft as grease; as soft as our Tommy."

"It's a good thing," said the postman, "as Lady Sarah bears it so admirable."

"She'd cry," said the drover, "mark my word, she'd cry as soon as she got round the corner. Wenches has feelin's. I know that by our S'r' Ann."

"I lay it as Lord Beiley had fun' out summat again her just at the last," said the farmer.

"That ud be about the colour on it," said the landlord.

Lord Beiley's terrible anger only increased his paleness.

"It would be as well," he said sternly, "if you didn't intrude into the thoughts and motives of ladies and gentlemen."

"I don't intrude," said the farmer gruffly, and held the newspaper forth; "I've paid my ha'penny for't."

Lord Beiley felt it to be true; he had caused scandal to be on sale throughout the country by ha'porths, scandal about the lady whom he most respected.

"I bet," said the postman, "as she'll mek 'im pay pretty heavy yit for this 'ere disappointment."

"If he can't prove noat again her character," said the farmer; "and he's bound to hae a good try."

Her bridegroom had to stand and hear it.

"There was once a woman in Ireland," said the landlord, "as got ten thousand pound damages for breach o' promise."

"Ten thousand pound! Whew!" said the drover, and whistled through the gaps in his black teeth. "That's good market! There moot be much plenty o' money in Ireland, or else a gret scarsity o' women."

"Is there any reward offered, mester," said the postman, "for finding on him?"

The farmer cast his eyes back over the paper.

"No; it only says, 'The two noble families involved will be grateful for any information leading to the discovery of his lordship's present whereabouts.'"

"Ah?" said the postman. "Well, to my mind that een't hardly put as if they was very fierce to see 'im again."

"All lords is a shafflin' sort o' pussons," said the drover.

"Ah, Johnny," said the farmer, "then yo're a Radical?"

"I am, Mester Cubit," said the drover, "and a ronk un"—he smacked his lips as though he could taste the words—"a ronk un. Well," and he rose, "if the wench belonged me I shouldn't fancy mysen till I'd gied 'im a esh-plantin' wi' this stick o' mine." He smote the brick floor with his staff. "I wouldn't for five shillin', I wouldn't for a hull hafe-sovereign, as this 'ed 'appened our S'r' Ann. Good-mornin', gentlemen."

Farmer, landlord and postman laughed at the drover's peculiarity. He went out close at the heels of Lord Beiley, who turned outside the door, put three half-crowns into the drover's hand and walked away. But before he had crossed the railway he heard himself hailed by the drover's deep voice:

"Hi, sir, hi! Stop, sir, stop!"

He turned, and the drover came up to him holding out the coins in his unwashed hands, two in one and one in the other.

"Sir," he said, "yo meant kindly to gimme the price of a pint; yo've made a mistake, sir."

"So I have," said the lord, "and I beg your pardon."

"Oh, iv'rybody meks a mistake once i' their lives."

"Even you, Mr. Johnny?"

"Don't tell our S'r' Ann if yo see 'er. I once gied

a florin, a two-shillin' bit, i'stead of a penny. It gies me the horrors to this day when I dream about it."

Beiley took back the silver, and in their place put a like number of sovereigns in Johnny's palm.

"Good-day, Mr. Johnny," he said, and walked up the road, leaving the drover fixed in a stony astonishment.

He passed the station without even looking at it. Before travelling by rail one has to name a destination; for him who moves for the mere purpose of changing place without the least drawing from any point of the compass, for him his legs are the only beast of burden. The foot-passenger has no need to look one step in advance, he may go as though he stood and the road glided under him mechanically. And Beiley, although so recently severed from the many ties with which custom, indolence, negligence, convention had tethered him, was already a vagabond and knew a vagabond's lore. He walked at a vagabond's easy pace up the pleasant rising road and was not altogether displeased with his freedom. He had not entirely known until then what a load he had been carrying ever since he had had a man's shoulders to lay it on. The very hopelessness of his situation had its reckless comfort. If he thought about Lady Sally—he avoided thinking about her as much as he could—he was willing to take the news-sheet's word for it that she was bearing it admirably. He could imagine, when he must, her high-bred composure, unstrained though pale, amidst the general hubbub. At everything else, the anger of his kinsfolk, the contempt or amusement of his acquaintance, the general gape, he snapped his fingers. He walked on without once looking back, or he would have seen a little group of four men standing outside the inn and gazing up the road at him with much interest.

It was a day of moods. There was a breeze, fresh, not keen, from the north-west. The broken masses of cloud, white and grey, dark and uplighted, gave an especial value to the few patches of blue, even as the

constant threat of rain did to the fugitive promise of shine. There were frequent showers, as heavy as they were short-lived. The road gently ascended, bordered sometimes by trees on one side, sometimes on both. When after a mile and a half it began to fall again he saw before him a considerable park, enclosing a mansion, a church and other buildings. Out of mere idleness he asked a passing labourer whose estate it was. He heard a name that was well known to him; the bearer of it had been invited to his wedding, had been a witness of his dishonour. He felt as though the trees testified against him. He went back a little way and turned aside to the right. He saw many such and even finer properties during his wanderings, but never again was he so inquisitive as to inquire after name or ownership.

He continued walking at an easy pace through a country that made no impression on his mind, and shortly after noon reached a little one-churched town, where he lunched at a decent inn. He did not go out again that day, yet did not resolve to stay the night there until the minute before he rang for a candle. Again he retired early, slept well, breakfasted well. Being moderately comfortable there he might as well have remained another day; that was his own thought; nevertheless he was out of doors by ten o'clock in the morning. He walked at random by devious ways and so found himself towards evening at a larger, a three-church town, some half-dozen miles from the other; went as by instinct straight to the best hotel, dined and slept, slept well. Nothing seemed to trouble him but his corns and a big blister under each heel.

He breakfasted well next morning, he who had been wont to begin the day with a loathing of food and the faces of his fellow-men. Lingering over his coffee he cast a desultory eye up and down the newspaper enlargements of the "Lord Beiley Mystery" with a contemptuous amusement; which is perhaps the mood of all others which best keeps a man in a good opinion of himself. He learnt that it was by Lady Sally's desire

that the wedding was to have taken place at Sheraton, but that it was his own eccentric choice to put up at a Nottingham hotel rather than accept the hospitality which had been abundantly offered him. He learnt that his best man had received a midnight telegram, "I have gone for a walk. May be late. Have everything ready," which had encouraged him to hope to the last minute. He learnt that he had been traced to Welham, whither he had gone in the company of a Sunday-school party; that he had joined in their cricket match and afterwards given them an address on punctuality, which was the cause of his missing his train. He learnt that he had gone on the operatic stage, for which he had a passion. Of this documentary proof was put in, his portrait (from a photograph) as an amateur Christy minstrel, which in his own opinion flattered his legs and calumniated his smile. He learnt in addition that his cap had been found on the banks of the river; that he had been seen the next day at the Trent-side village of Arby, where with a fellow-feeling for singularity of intellect he had emptied his purse into the hat of the parish fool. Lies and truth were interwoven with such ingenuity and excellent effect, as made it doubtful whether in a perfectly truthful world the clever man would have his proper opportunity of displaying himself.

As he turned out of the hotel hard upon noon of a lowering day, he went to the left when he might as well have gone to the right; which as I take it is the only satisfactory way of beginning a morning's walk. He walked gingerly because of the blisters and was constantly under the eye of a policeman, who was pacing as slowly but more at his ease on the other side of the way. At length, after consulting a printed paper, the policeman seemed to come to a decision; he crossed the road and addressed his lordship.

"Beg pardon, sir, but aren't you Lord Beiley?"

"That is my name. Have you any business with me?"

"Only there's some inquiries being made for your lordship."

"Inquiries with what object?"

"With the object to hascertain your vicinity, my lord."

"Well, you'll be able to satisfy the inquirers. I hope they'll make it worth your while. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, my lord."

Beiley walked quietly away, leaving the policeman on the pavement nonplussed by his perfect indifference. Nevertheless he felt the desirability of his leaving the town as soon as might be. Still going gently, never looking back, he passed the railway station. There he hailed a cab and bade the driver take him a few miles out into the country, no matter in what direction. It is hard to say when the taking of a direction does not matter; certainly in his case it did not matter with regard to the scenery. His vision only so far departed from the close carriage, that he was sometimes aware of a change on the borders of the road from trim hedge to overhanging wood. When he felt sufficient weariness of the confinement to be active in it, he stopped the cab and dismissed it. His own direction was determined by his not having determined; he took the way that the driver left to him.

It was a broad perfectly kept road in the midst of a forest; well frequented too, by bicyclists chiefly. Perhaps that was the reason, if reason there was, why he turned aside at the first grassy glade that offered itself. Huge oaks roofed his path over with their continuous boughs, their grim trunks walled it about; the lowering clouds seemed hardly higher than their tops. He was not wont to take the colour of his mood from his surroundings, but he felt them just then to be oppressively sombre.

Later on the clouds removed themselves from the tops of the trees, the sun burst suddenly through, and pervading with his light the fresh yellowy-green foliage gave it a charm which it had not had before. What most struck his sense was the silvery refulgence of the slender birch-stems, which in that part of the forest

were intermixed with the venerable oaks. It was like the laughter of youth qualifying, for the moment transforming the severity and despondency of age. Soon however the clouds returned, the sun's rays had to brook interference, the glistering silver, the luminous greens were again degraded to grey, even as the sky was grey, with a difference, and those dark enormous boles. It began to rain. For some hours he remained in shelter under the trees, until hunger and the drip of the rain through the trees drove him forth to a village situated in a break in the forest. It was a tiny one-ideaed place, built to pattern in neat unattractive semi-detached cottages. Into one of them he was glad to procure admission and permission to go to bed while his clothes dried, together with food and a night's lodging.

CHAPTER VI

TWOPENCE AN HOUR

NEXT morning he felt listless and depressed, more I am afraid on account of a cold in the head than of a becoming sense of his misconduct. He hardly looked at his breakfast. Nevertheless he was pushed out of doors by his own restlessness before the bicyclist began to haunt the roads. It was a warm close day; the sun's heat seemed only to strike with more oppressive force for the vaporous veil which slightly tempered its radiance. He walked with his back to it, whereby he was the more open to its assault. Soon he came to a tract of forest wilder than any he had seen the day before, though not so thickly set with oaks. The ground between was overgrown with grey-green heather and yellowy-green bracken. He was glad to turn aside from the hot white road to a narrow path, in which he got an intermittent relief from the sun's tyranny.

He had loitered so for perhaps an hour, dodging the sun, when in a shady nook formed by the meeting of two roads he happened on an old stone-breaker plying his trade, a little thick-set stubbly-chinned broken-down old man. He sat down with his back to an ancient thorn-tree, kept the flies off his face with a bracken frond, and without interest, through half-shut eyelids, watched the stone-breaker's performance. Between strokes the old man peered back at him over his anvil. After a while he stopped working and said:

"Why don't yer speak?"

"Because I've nothing to say," said Lord Beiley.

"Noat at all?"

"Noat at all."

"Then yo *are* empty. The folks at our pub once hed a parrot as said, 'Ow's yer poor feet?' She were full to yo."

He chipped another stone or two, then laid his tools down on the anvil and coming nearer looked Lord Beiley over with purblind eyes. We cannot know how much he really saw of the languid young man before him with red nose and running eyes, and in clothes already the worse for the weather; but apparently the sum of his impressions was unfavourable, for he said:

"What's the matter wi' yer?"

"General depression, old man."

"What's that? Summat i' th' belly or summat i' th' head?"

"Both; and in the spirits too."

"Then yo *are* down, sartainlye! I've bin down mysen, own more oftener nor hup. But not i' the sperrits an' all; no, niver."

The old man apparently took a sudden resolution; there was a little glimmer in his dull eyes, a slight tightening of his lax toothless mouth.

"Here!" He laid by his hammer. "Do yer want a job?"

"Desperately bad; I think that's what I've been wanting all my life."

"Dear heart, that's bad! that's mortal bad! Why don't yer tek up wee a sattled trade like me?"

"Unfortunately I wasn't brought up to a trade."

"Tut, tut! Well, it's niver too late to begin. D' yer think as I sarved seven years' 'prentice to thisn? Not a bit on't; I just went at it full drive. But I reckon I'm a wittier man nor yo. Howiver men mun live; they've guts if they've non brains. Look 'ere! I've niver bin a gaffer yit. I shouldn't like to goo to a better place afore I'd knowed what it wor to hae men unner yer an' sweer at 'em about noats. Hark at me! I'll gie yer a shillin' an' hafe o' my dinner if yo'll finish my day's work for me."

"I'll do it gladly," said Beiley, prophesying he knew not what.

"Gladly's a good-promisin' word; it shows yo're a lad wi' a bit o' spunk, if it's nubbut a bit."

The stone-breaker gave up his tools, hammer, hoop and the wire shade that protected his eyes; then sat down in the viscount's place with his back to the knotty thorn-tree, filled his pipe and with much visible enjoyment began to play the part of employer. But he was ill content with his day-man's first strokes, which splintered the stones indeed, but scattered the fragments in every direction.

"Drabbit it, man!" he cried, "hae yer no more gumption nor that? Both yer hands mun be bollocky.[1] Look at me, nummy, an' see how I do't."

He was angry no doubt, his wrinkled forehead was quite red therewith, but it was an anger which he thoroughly enjoyed. He took the hammer from his lordship's ineffective hand with the mien of a superior.

"Theer! joost a bit of a tap, smart-like, as if yo were giein' yer kid a scutch across the shou'ders for stannin' i' th' gate."

Beiley tried again; but then his blows were too gentle, so that nothing resulted but a little complaining cry of stone caught between metal and metal.

"Not a that 'ow, dang it!" quoth the old man, taking his pipe out. "Y'ud make a dumb man say 'be dalled,' while a deaf un heerd 'im. Do't the road I telled yer, yo targel![2] By gash, it'll be much if yo get agate afore night-time. B'leddy it will. Damn it, it will. I've the raight to sweer as a employer o' labour. Gie the stun a quick-slow big-little rap ower the head, yo boafin,[3] like as if 'twor a nut an' it behoved yer to break the shell, but not to scrush the kernel. Do yer unnerstan' that?"

"I think I do, partly."

"Then fall to an' do it, partly, or't will be the worse for somebody, partly."

[1] Left-handed. [2] Wastrel. [3] Simpleton.

Beiley once more essayed, and by degrees with difficulty attained to something like a stroke of the proper restrained violence; so that his employer could sit back and without removing his pipe insult him at his ease. A starling on an oak hard by took much interest in their doings, and uttered many comments thereon, mainly satirical, to the vast amusement of a flighty blue-cap who lurked and looked, lurked and looked, sometimes erect, sometimes horizontal, sometimes upside-down, in that and neighbouring trees. But when the sun was at his highest the master stone-breaker brought forth his dinner from an old mat-basket, and spreading it out on his knees fairly halved if; then called to his day-man:

"Yo may knock off now, my man. Coom an' put yer back to this stauving[1] an' see if yer hae a better belly for meat nor yer hae for work."

Beiley sat beside him, glad of the rest; but to his surprise glad also of the humble fare offered him by hands none too clean; bread of a dusky white, hard coarse-flavoured cheese that bit the tongue, and a draught now and again, hobnob with his employer, from a bottle of common beer. The satirical starling was quiet for the time being; but a thrush from the top of an up-standing elm sang his full-throated song, sustained, not interrupted, by the minor strains of blackbird, robin, chiff-chaff and tomtit.

"Well, my man," said the stone-breaker, picking with his horny fingers the last crumbs from his rusty corduroys, "and how should yer cotton to stun-breakin' for a reg'larity?"

"I like it very well, sir, for the time being, but for a regularity I should prefer a trade with a little more variety."

"Variety? What ails the man to be so saucy? We've a wunnerful sight o' variety unner this tree. M'appen yo think as the sun allus shines an' the birds allus sings an' the flowers allus blows, an' e'erything

[1] Stump.

goos on all the year round in the same oad cow-pad?"[1]

"Not exactly."

"Not exackly? No, nor noat like. Not exackly! What a funny-talkin' chap yo are, for surelye. We hae nubbody like yo i' these parts, not even hafe-baked Sam as even the kids laughs at his talk. I doubt yo mun ayther a bin born wantin' or else a bin bad bro't up."

Between two puffs at the cigar he was lighting Lord Beiley answered, "Probably something of both."

"Well, I'm not a-gooin' to slur yer for't. A man's born an' bro't up how he's provided, that's the Solomon truth; but a man may pick his trade, within raison. Besides this stun-breakin' I might ha' done odd work for Mrs. Short or gone to the work'us; that's choice enough for any sensable body. What d' yer say to that?"

"I should prefer a choice a little more extensive."

"I doubt yo're a poor shackin' sort o' person. Ben Hall tells a tale of a man—'e gies name an' time an' place to't, but I've forgot 'em—a man as clammed to dead afore 'e could mek up 'is mind which side th' apple to bite first. M'appen yo'd perfer to be a lord or some sort o' high quallity?"

"No, I think that's just the kind of trade at which I should shine least."

"Shoine? Yo moan't think o' shoinin'. M'appen yo think yo're the sun, or m'appen the moon? No, no, them high notions don't suit a iv'ry-day chap like yo. I'd a brother as got it into 'is head as 'e moot be a shop-boy at Sheffield. He were noat to me; I weighed a stun more an' were a good two year yoonger."

"What became of him?" said Beiley, seeing that the old man sucked his pipe and did not pursue his story.

"In six months 'e were dead o' new-mown-'ay. No, no, my man; if yo can break stuns enough i' th' day to find yer a bite an' a sup an' a lay-down at night, it behoves sich as yo to be satisfied."

"I half think I might be."

[1] Cow-path, *i. e.* routine.

"Hafe think? What sort rotten fool's language is thatn? Hae yer nubbut hafe a head? I've niver hed much opinion o' furreners, but yo cap all the furreners as iver I seed or heerd. Well, well, what's the use o' gab?" He returned his pipe to his mouth and continued to mutter broken sentences between the puffs. "A man is—what 'e is. Yo can't bully hinder-ends—into bein' the pick o' the corn."

His further utterances were lost upon his employee, who, his half-smoked cigar in his idle hand, had fallen asleep in an attitude of whose discomfort an occasional snort or forward jerk of the head proved that he was slumberously conscious. But he did not fully wake until he felt the thrust of the old man's rude hand between his ribs.

"Coom, coom!" said the stone-breaker; "wakken oop! This is three times I've telled yer. I don't heer o' no plazen wheer yo can addle twopence a hour wi' hutchin' an' snorin'."

"I've but just sat down," said Beiley.

"Hark at 'im! Yo're bone-idle, my man, an' m'appen yer think if yer niver gets no worser disease on yer nor that yo'll live to a great age. Very like, but not i' my 'ployment; after to-day I'm shut on yer; an' to that 'shut' I say 'good shut.'"

Lord Beiley like any other reluctant day-man had to rise, straighten his aching back and grasp the hammer again in his sore hand. The sun had discarded the veil and shot down his arrows of light and his ardours with an almost vertical fury. The heat was overpowering even in the shade; the birds neither sang nor sported, but the buzzing stinging flies were not to be driven off. It was a long, long afternoon; slow were the shadows in lengthening out; the sun seemed to be fixed in the blue sky. Still he chipped and chipped with a mechanical industry, as though forced on by something outside himself, as though an irresistible task-master stood over him and a compulsory metronome timed his strokes. Drowsiness came upon him, not with that sweet languor

which invites repose; its invasion was the act of an enemy. It benumbed his senses but not his sensibilities, and was so far from dulling his sufferings that it was itself an added pain. While still he chipped and chipped.

"Which is the turn for Sopton, my good man?"

He heard the voice as in a sleep, yet heard it with a pointed distinctness; and his resentment of its tone accompanied rather than followed, so quickly came it upon the heels of his hearing. A personal resentment; nay, lo! in a flash a general resentment, of the condescensions which he had, and men like him have for uncountable ages, bestowed upon common man, making a difference between themselves and their fellows; not a distinction but a separation. Probably if he had been wide awake, perfectly himself, he would hardly have come at it so soon, but he was in that unbalanced state when on a rare sometimes the essential man gets the better of the man accidental and throws him. He saw as well as heard, saw above him a man on horseback, perfectly equipped, perfectly well-bred, perfectly insufferable.

"Why do you call me good?" he said.

The horseman was as unmoved by his anger as a god might be by the five-minute fury of a midget.

"I beg pardon, I withdraw the epithet if offensive. Will you be good enough—kind enough, I would say—to direct me to Sopton?"

"Yo should 'dress yersen to me, sir," said the stone-breaker, "if yo want a unnerstandable answer. The man's nubbut my day-man, an' no gret shakes of a day-man nayther. Yo want to keep strite on, sir, for Sopton; strite on, as strite as yer can goo, while yer coom to a turn; then turn to yer left 'and, that-a-road."

The horseman thanked him and rode on. Being fully awake Beiley hardly comprehended wherein he had been offended. He did not however waste thought over it; his preoccupations were immediate to himself. He now felt an ache in every part from head to foot, but especi-

ally in the arm and shoulder that struck. His hands, which had been chafed, became blistered; soon the irritated blisters broke and the hammer's heft was wet with his blood. He was tormented too by hunger and thirst, pains new to him; and especially by a growing thirst which a rare brief sip at the stone bottle seemed only to aggravate. He lacked moreover what distraction there might have been in the pass-the-time vituperation of the old man, who overcome by the heat and the unwonted rest lay along the grassy bank and snored at his ease. But Beiley's pride took up the office of taskmaster and forbade him to give in. It was self-humiliating to know, would have been an open disgrace to confess, that half a day's endurance of that poor decrepit old man's year-long burden was too much for his strength and courage.

But the sun was not fixed; slowly the shadows grew longer than the objects which cast them; the birds awakening from their afternoon drowse began again to pipe. Lord Beiley had never been better pleased in his life than when the stone-breaker started with a final snort from his last slumber, cast his eyes up to the heavens and said:

"Yo may tek off now. A man can't be allus at work, even if it be nubbut shafflin' work. That's proved by this: the poorest slowest awk'ardest worker as iver I knowed, next yersen, allus wanted the most hallidays. Well, if yo hain't done a shillin'sworth o' work, I've had a shillin'sworth o' pleasure out on yer. I've enjoyed this day, I can't say I hain't; it's tasted quite different to a Sunday; m'appen becos the chutch bells worn't nag-naggin' at yer all the time."

He took from his trouser pocket a scrap of dirty rag gathered with a shred of twine into the semblance of a small bag.

"If yo're wantin' yer charicter it's this: yo're a man as I'd a sight rayther tek on by the day nor the week, an' by the hour nor the day."

He untied the rag and disclosed a silver coin and half

a dozen of bronze. He took the former, a two-shilling piece, between finger and thumb.

"I nedn't ax if yo can change thisn. Yo'll hae to coom wi' me into the village; we shall manage to get it changed theer by hook or crook; we've some well-doing people."

"I think I can give you the change," said Beiley.

"Then yo're better off nor what yo've any appearance."

Beiley received the florin and put a sovereign into the old man's palm.

"It's a very bad colour," said the latter, examining the coin with a purblind closeness. "Howiver theer's the King's head, an' if yo can pass for a man I don't see why it shouldn't pass for a shillin'."

"Thank you, sir."

"Yo couldn't touch yer 'at to me, could yer? I've often wunnered how't felt."

"I'm afraid not; you didn't bargain for that."

"By gum, it's funny as sich a loose worker should be sich a stret bargainer. Iv'ry man, be he iver sich a wastrel, has one good quallity for sartainlye. Well, would yer for twopence?"

"I would for threepence."

"Lawk! the man's a-coomin' out. What a rawper an' a scrawper it is! Well, I'm mekkin' a day on't; say it's for the next crownation; thruppence be't. And now!"

Beiley saluted him, hand to cap, and again said:

"Thank you, sir."

A sudden brief gleam of pleasure uplighted the withered face.

"Do't again," said the old man, "do't again. I didn't hardly see't; I warn't prepared."

Lord Beiley did it again. The old man seemed to smack his lips over it.

"It's unaccountable upliftin'; I don't wunner as the bettermost folk thinks so much to't. Hae yer iver had it done to yo?"

"Yes."

"How did it mek yer feel?"

"No different."

The stone-breaker peered up into Lord Beiley's face, as though taking an inventory of his faculties.

"I doubt, surry, yo're a bit wantin' somewheer; ayther in yer feelin's or yer thinkin's. I wouldn't a missed it for noat. Not if 't 'ad a bin a penny more. I wain't niver no more deny but what I've gotten my money's worth out on yer. This'll be a day to look back on; ay, for years an' years. Don't be down i' th' mug; ne'er mind what I said; a man moot hull slurs an' brags about if he'd be tho't oat on. Send to me for yer charicter; I'll let 'em to know that for a poor wanklin [1] cratur yo've good properties. I reckon yo'll be for keepin' to the road like all yo travellin' folk; I'm for this-away."

"I'm for the nearest place where I can get something to eat and drink."

"That'll be Mrs. Houghton's ''commodation for bicyclers'; but I doubt she wain't 'commodate no tramps; she's a farmer's widder. Besides yo'd non find it; it's a hin-an'-out road; a person o' sense might loase hissen."

Nevertheless at Beiley's persistence the old man gave the necessary directions. After bidding him good-day he turned back and said:

"Could yer do't again? As a favour."

Beiley again touched his cap and said, "Good-day, sir." The old fellow shambled off, bowed in the back, tottery in the legs, muddled in the head, but quite happy. It seemed long, though it was but a mile of woodland walking, before his day-man came at once to a road again and a little cottage with a modest card in the window, "Cyclists Accommodated." He knocked and a woman came to the door.

"I'm not a cyclist," he said, "but I'm very hungry, and especially very thirsty. Can you accommodate me?"

[1] Weakly.

She led him into a pleasant little room looking away from the sun through open windows into a garden, in which flowers, vegetables and fruit, bush and tree, grew in an admirable disarrangement. From without came a child's voice singing softly:

"Come, sun!
Day's begun,
And the swallows are stirring under the eaves.
Come, moon!
Day is done,
And the white moth is flitting among the leaves."

The air was fresh; it seemed as though summer were but a cool never-intrusive visitor there. The sun still lighted up the apple and plum trees, but had taken leave of the gooseberries and currants at their feet. Beiley washed his bleeding burning hands in cold new-drawn water, and then lay back in an easy-chair, expectant of the fragrant tea, the sweet cream, the home-made bread and butter, the eggs warm from the nest, the jam, the scones and quivering icy jelly, which with small delay were deftly, silently served up on a snow-white cloth by the mistress of the house and a girl of about seven. They were both in black; the former, a quiet gentle-eyed woman neither young nor elderly, wore a widow's cap and had the marks on her, unmistakable, unobtrusive, of a recent grief.

His thirst was a recurrent pain, so when at last he had satisfied his hunger, he lay back in the cushioned chair by the open window and drank and rested and then drank again from fresh-brewed tea. The incoming air spiced by the flowers took the heat from his brow. Ever and anon one bee of the many that visited the snapdragons under the window buzzed in and buzzed out again; the sparrows chattered on the low eaves of the thatch; the pigeons' coo had a far-off nearness. His waitresses, both girl and woman, were silent and soft-footed; no cyclist came. To recline there half awake was a mere dream of existence; its restful quiet without its memory and other pains. So it was nightfall before he began

to think of rising and going on his way, and then with repugnance; the road seemed so toilsome, the chair so easy. He asked if it would be convenient for him to stay the night. The woman said she was afraid not; the house was small; she had never lodged anybody.

"I'm very tired; I should have been glad to go no further."

She looked at him, hesitated, said:

"I have two bedrooms, sir; if you wouldn't mind occupying my daughter's. It's small, but I think I could make you fairly comfortable for a night."

"Thank you, I shall be glad to do so; with the young lady's permission."

Within half an hour he was asleep between clean cool sheets. But his hostess had done better than her promise; for on second thoughts she had given the larger room up to him, and herself with her daughter occupied the smaller.

CHAPTER VII

CYCLISTS ACCOMMODATED

THE fringe of a thunder-storm passed over the little cottage in the night, but without disturbing Lord Beiley's sleep. In the morning it still rained; only passing showers, but enough to make a weary man think much of the long road. While the girl went in and out removing his late breakfast he spoke to her. She was a quiet little black-frocked thing with a pale face set about with wavy dark-brown hair, and her speech had the directness of a shy simplicity.

"May I ask your name?" he said.

"Yes," said she.

"What is it?"

"Bertha." And then after a shy pause, "May I ask yours?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Jack."

"Mr. Jack or Jack Only?"

"Jack Only."

She went out with cup and plate and returned for the coffee-pot.

"Bertha, should you object to my stopping here all day?"

"No." The pause as before. "If you won't give mother a deal of trouble."

"What do you mean by a deal of trouble?"

"I mean—I mean—lobster salad. It *is* a deal of trouble, you know, when you've no lobsters."

"I will do without lobster salad."

Again the little maid went and returned.

"If you please, Mr. Jack——"

"Jack Only, you know."

"Mother says I'd better call you Mr. Jack."

"Very good, Miss Bertha."

"But nobody calls me Miss except the rat-catcher."

"Nobody calls me Mister, not even the rat-catcher."

In a minute she had gone and come again.

"Mother says I may call you Jack, since you desire it, but"—again that odd shy little pause—"but I mustn't be too familiar."

"But about my stopping?"

"If you please, Jack, mother says she will be pleased for you to remain for the day. What should you prefer for luncheon?"

"Whatever is most convenient to your mother."

"Aren't you poor?" She scanned him, as though to see if it were written on him.

"No, I believe not."

"All the Onlies about here are. Is it because you've got their share?"

"It may be so."

She had already quite forgotten her hesitative shyness.

"Couldn't you give a little of it back? Bill Only is so very poor; so is Mary Only. P'raps you didn't know? P'raps you said, 'They're used to it; they don't mind.'"

"I believe I have said so."

"Mrs. Crich said so. But I asked Mary and she said, they are used to it, but they do mind. I told Mrs. Crich and she said I was a funny little thing. Do you think I'm a funny little thing?"

She put the question with a certain wistful anxiety.

"Not at all."

"I don't mind being little till I'm big, but funny people always forget not to be too familiar, or else they've always never been told."

"If I wanted to give a little back to Bill and Mary would you take it to them for me?"

"Oh yes! Now I must go back to my lessons. I had a holiday on Monday and Tuesday. Are you having your holiday?"

"What is a holiday?"

"Don't you know? It's a don't-have-to-do day. It's a day—if there's something you don't like doing, you do it another day."

"Then I think you may say, Bertha, that I am having my holiday."

Beiley never once went outside the gate all the day. So long as it rained he was content to sit and listen to the soft s-less whispering of the rain, to the leaves and the little house-noises, subdued footsteps, murmurs, rustlings, jinglings, knockings, sweepings; semblances of sound, but sufficient to occupy the else unoccupied. Once he went to the door and set it ajar that he might hear the better; then feeling ashamed shut it again. When the rain ceased and the sun came forth, the several chants of the birds swelled into a chorus; and Bertha tripped softly out into the garden, singing as she went in a voice that was as small, high-pitched and musical as a blue-tit's:

"I can't see the wind but he can see me,
And he found me behind a great big tree;
He blew back my hair and bade me not fear,
Then whispered a secret into my ear."

He put on his cap and went out to her.

A flower-bed next the house, two plum and three apple trees lording it over some dozen gooseberry and currant bushes, two rows of young peas and a line of tall stakes ready for the scarlet-runners which had just begun to appear; finally in the remotest corner a rude thatched arbour, whose embellishment of climbing rose, woodbine and white jessamine was not disturbed by any freshness of paint or other artificial decoration; such was the garden. One narrow ungravelled path skirted the hedge, another led up the middle. It was only separated from the surrounding woods by a close of plough-land. But

the charm of it was this, that one was always coming upon flowers in unexpected places, foxgloves, Solomon's seals, pinks, snapdragons, deep-tinted flags, gillivers, French willows, roses, as though they had been arranged at the uncalculating will of the birds or the wind or a little maid. Bertha skipped down with a step that was a rhythmic union of dance, hop and run; stood a little aloof for a minute, as though using herself to seeing him out of doors, and then came nearer. The rain-sprayed flowers were yielding the prime of their scent.

"Mother said that as I'd done my grammar moderately well, I could come out for ten minutes to see if the rain had made any difference to my rose-tree. It has made a difference; a whole difference. Do you know when 'crown' is a noun and when it's a verb?"

"No. When is it?"

"It's a noun——" Standing under a clump of tall lilies she brooded over the answer for a minute, with her mind however partly on the bees that went in and out of the great white cups. "It's a noun when—when you know what it is, and it's a verb when you don't."

"If I stayed here long enough, Bertha, I should become as learned as yourself."

"Should you like to stay here long enough, Jack?"

"I should; I think this must be the garden of Eden."

"Oh no, it isn't; Eden's a long long long way off. It's where my box of dates came from. But you couldn't go in, you know, if you went." She lowered her voice. "There's an angel." She drew close to him, as though she saw. "With a sword." The contact like the approach of a magnet drew the steel in him, what was best in him, nearer the surface. She looked up at him and her voice gained confidence. "But do you think it's a sword that cuts?"

"No, I don't."

"Very likely not. But I wish he'd leave it at home, out of the reach of the children. Tom Barnsley has a sword that doesn't cut; it's only wood; and I shouldn't

run away when he says, 'Oi'll cut yer heäd off,' only I forget. Then afterwards I remember. Do you do like that?"

"Always."

The mother from the house-door called Bertha in to her lessons. But even when the child was gone the place still seemed to have a resemblance to the garden of Eden. It was so shut in, first by its own high quick-set hedge and then by the surrounding woods; it was so leafy, so aloof, so quiet, so begemmed with rain-drops, so besung by birds and so hallowed by innocence. It was possible for one to imagine in a brief truce with reason, that on ward at that narrow garden gate was an angel, whose weapon had a friendly protective aspect from within and only a fiery edge for the would-be entrance of perversity and pain.

The next day was fine—but it was Sunday—and the next—but it was Monday, and still Beiley stayed on, making no engagement either to himself or his hostess save from day to day. Mrs. Houghton had procured him change of underclothing and engaged a man from the nearest village to come and shave him. He avoided the lordly park on which the front of the cottage looked, but he sometimes walked in the great plantations which surrounded it on every other side; sometimes in the shred of open forest where he had found the stone-breaker, a square mile of heather and bracken, oak and thorn, bridled by roads but yet untamed. For the most part however he was content with the narrow compass of the garden or the stricter seclusion of his room.

But on the following Saturday the world broke into that Eden, mounted on bicycles. The day was cloudless, the roads perfect, the briar roses and hawthorn, the lime and mountain ash were in bloom; and more than that, there was an agricultural show somewhere in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Houghton was kept occupied from midday by a constant succession of visitors, some merely to swallow a draught of milk or lemonade and ride on, some to drink tea, but others for more solid

refection. Beiley gave up his room for their accommodation and spent most of the afternoon in the quietest by-paths of the neighbouring woodlands. When he returned there was a motor-car standing by the gate besides some dozen bicycles leaning against the fence. Bertha came out to him as he stood hesitating to enter; there was perplexity on her face.

"Mother's in trouble, Jack," she said.

"How so, Bertha? Lobster salad?"

"Worse, a deal worse. There are five motor people in your parlour, four bicycle people in my bedroom and seven all-sorts squeezed up in the arbour. And oh, Jack, oh, Jack, such appetites for ham and eggs! And no bread left but just enough for you."

She clasped her little hands piteously.

"Why not send to the baker's for more?"

"It's at Sopworth, five miles off, and they wouldn't wait. Their eyes seem to be nibbling bits off me every time I go in. Do I look smaller?"

"Not noticeably, Bertha."

Beiley felt the urgency of a strange, an heroic impulse; to his own astonishment.

"If the owner of this motor would lend it, I could go and fetch some in a very few minutes."

Mrs. Houghton overheard and came to the door with the flush of an ashamed gratitude on her pale face.

"This is my harvest-time, sir," she said; "and we're sometimes compelled to be so unmannerly as to accept help without considering the propriety of doing so."

The owner or perhaps the hirer of the car came out, a bustling blustering self-important person. He was stout but not tall, yet having possession of the doorstep was able to look down on Lord Beiley.

"What's this? Want to borrer my motor, young man? What do you know about motors?"

"Nothing but this: that I know how to steer one."

"How come *you* to know that?"

"I have had one or two of my own; I believe I have still."

"Believe? I don't believe, I know. And I think if you'd one you'd know to it, and if you'd two you'd know more. My motor cost me five 'undred and fifty and it don't go out of my sight and 'earing; not for Joseph!"

"To oblige the lady of the house. She's in a difficulty."

"The first person as a man's under obligation to oblige is his own self. No, no, it won't work."

"Would it be too much trouble for you to come with me?"

"Thanks, no; I'm not in the habit of going a-shopping myself; I leave that to the gell."

Beiley took Bertha by the hand.

"If this young lady is willing to accompany me? Would you accept that as security for my return?"

"Nay, nay; the security may be good as fur as it goes, only there's so little of it."

But even while the motorist spoke it occurred to him that his seriously-conceived dictum had near the surface, to be brought out with little hammering, the latent merits of a quip worthy of repetition over glass and pipe; he chuckled in anticipation and was softened. Whereupon a close-cropped bullet head overpeered his shoulder and a husky good-humoured voice issued therefrom:

"Let 'em go, Tom, without such a blooming pedigree. A fiver to a tanner he's on the straight."

The motorist was in the main a good-natured fellow, so at last he said:

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright," said Lord Beiley.

"What a blooming lawyer yer are, Tom!" said his friend behind.

"Well, don't be long gone, for we're 'ungry. And be sure and don't turn the corners too stunt. And see as the little gell's lapped up; for blow me, it's a curious

thing, riding them things, but the hotter yer get the colder yer feel."

Regardless of acts of Parliament and police regulations the motor-car whirled along, up and down, at thirty miles to the hour. The surface of the road was perfect. Woods bordered it on either hand, sometimes overhanging, sometimes set back a little. The still air seemed to be in a hurricane; the hedges fled by like troops of panic-stricken shadows. Bertha, enwrapped all but her nose and eyes in her mother's cloak, screwed up her eyelids so as to leave but the narrowest peep-hole; she gasped for breath, she paled, she shuddered, she hung on by her companion's arm. In a few minutes they stopped at the grocery door.

"Were you afraid?" asked Beiley.

"Oh yes, just lovely afraid. I mean love-li-li-ly afraid. It was like dropping out of my bedroom window with the garden taken away and only the place left."

Soon they were on the return.

"Make the air angry again," said Bertha.

Again the engine throbbed, the wheels whirled, the shadowy trees rushed by, the dust lengthened out into a trailing cloud. Again Bertha was delightsomely affrighted, made the slit of her eyelids as narrow as a cat's midday pupil, and nervously clutched Beiley by the sleeve. But she laughed gaspily when a proud bantam cockerel was resolved not to give them way; then suddenly, just in time, changed his mind with a shriek superlatively feminine. To Beiley also the drive had somewhat of the zest of an adventure. The hurry, the blast, the smell, the dust were not new to him; but he had never before gone on an errand to the baker's; he had sat beside many a pretty face, but never one so quick and candid in its changes. In a quarter of an hour from the start they had safely delivered to Mrs. Houghton a quartern of yesterday's and four half-quarterns of to-day's, besides a gammon of bacon and two shillingsworth of fresh eggs.

"Oh, wasn't the air angry?" said Bertha, before

she had quite recovered breath. "Not real angry, you know, or it wouldn't have stopped as soon as we did. Quite angry people don't, you know; they go on. Do you know Mrs. Tomson?"

"I think not."

"Oh, you'd know if you did."

Meanwhile the man with the bullet head had made a small book of bets on the speed of the run, and was now calling in his winnings. The time-estimates of his friends had varied from a pessimist's "never no more" to the owner or hirer's would-be cool "a hour at least" and a red-faced man's sanguinely-calculative "thirty one, five seconds."

"I knowed," said the prudently-speculative winner, putting his gains away with a business-like absence of elation.

"How *could* yer know?" said the pessimist.

"Why *shouldn't* 'e know?" said the red-faced optimist.

"What *did* yer know?" said the owner or hirer.

"I seed as how this gent kep his lips neither slack nor stret, whilst you was giving him all the fool's gab you was worth, Tom; which ain't a little, lemme say. Now the man as can keep lew-warm whilst all around's in a swelter or a frost is the chap to pile all yer money on, be't for a hoss-race, a fight, a grinning match or a go-as-yer-please leg-o'-mutton 'andicap. Mind, I don't admire them chaps as keeps frozzen in the blooming sunshine, as if they'd swallered a blooming refrigimator. No, a man wants to keep allus teepid; just anoo 'eat to slacken his elber-grease. Sir," he said, looking round at Lord Beiley, "I done very well by you." He took out of his breast-pocket a spirit-flask silver-bedizened. "May I offer you a drain?"

"If you would offer me a cup of your tea," said Beiley, "I should accept it with thanks."

The tea was immediately and heartily at his service, also the ham-sandwiches and bread-and-butter if he would accept of them. Yet his thirst and his amuse-

ment at the novel company did not move him to acceptance more strongly than his perception without a word or a look from his hostess, that she felt regret and embarrassment at his exclusion from his room. Which he himself was partly conscious of, with such vague uneasiness as visits a man when he first perceives some change, doubtfully good or bad, in the condition of his body.

He sat by the window and sipped his tea. His entertainers' conversation, seriously sportive for the most part, mixed with the loud hilarities of the party in the arbour; while before his eyes was the simple love-making of a pair of youthful sweethearts, who sat at a little round table under the open sky. They occupied separate though contiguous chairs, but ate from the same plate, drank from the same cup; Bertha flew to and fro bearing eatables and drinkables, and whenever she passed or repassed she glanced aside at his window and smiled. His attention was divided between the indoor talk about famous horses that were crocks and obscure horses that were morals and the lovers' pretty pecking at the same morsel of seed cake, when the bullet-headed man addressed him directly:

"Might I ask if you ever put a little on a hoss, sir?"

"I have done occasionally; but it didn't amuse me when I won nor even when I lost, so I dropped it."

"Sir, you've just the temperment for a successful booky. Yer ought to go in for it as a profession; you'd make a good thing of it."

But the bullet-headed man's insistence passed unnoticed, for the boy-lover against the girl's laughing protests was essaying to sweeten the tea by stirring it with her ring-finger. The cyclists in the room above were quiet but for their repeated calls for hot water and bread-and-butter. The cyclists in the arbour had done eating and drinking and were playing rough practical jokes upon one another.

The talk at the table glided from sport as a business to business, and especially the business of politics, as a

sport. The odds against Jenkinson as a parliamentary candidate for the Rushcliffe division were mixed with the latest quotations for the Ascot meeting. The sun was low in the red west; a little stirring of air came in by the window and tempered the closeness. The two lovers, trying to drink simultaneously from the finger-sweetened cup, spilt the tea down the lass's frock. The young men in the arbour having ceased their horse-play were singing, a lusty unison with however one voice casually and uncertainly groping after the bass:

"My eyes are on your eyelids,
My ears wait for you;
Down upon the daisies
Look no longer, Loo.
Nay, Loo,
No more delay, Loo;
Daisies neither hear nor see.
Look above, Loo;
Look where you love, Loo;
Speak to me!"

But when the boy-lover joined in, the girl-lover feigned to be offended and pushed her chair three inches from his. Her name it would appear was not Loo.

At length the motorists took their leave. The bullet-headed man's last word was to offer Beiley a tip that was a moral for the Northumberland Plate.

"Thank you," said Beiley; "but I can't promise to make use of it; the certainty would take away all my interest in the bet."

"Don't yer be afraid, if that's all," said the pessimist. "The bigger the sartainty the bigger the lig. For why? It 'olds more."

"For my part," said the optimist, "I'd sooner foller Billy's lead than Sammy's."

"Choice o' poisons," said the pessimist. "What the devil does it matter after y'ave bin landed, whether y'ave bin griped in yer bowels or burnt out of yer brains?"

"Nock," said the bullet-headed man, "if I couldn't

get more satisfaction out o' the worst nor what you do out o' the best, I'd present my friends with the pleasure o' paying for my fun'ral."

"It ud be a pleasure, no kid," said the pessimist. "But y'ave sucked me in once, Billy, just once."

"And why not more nor once, Nock?" said the bullet-headed man. "I'll tell yer why. Becos that once I sucked yer in so blooming thorough."

Having got the laugh on his side the bullet-headed man nodded to Beiley and went out. The rest of his party followed. The noisy bicyclists went off quietly and the quiet ones noisily. The lovers were the last to go in the diminishing daylight. He filched a sprig of lad's-love from the garden and pinned it on her blouse just over where her heart fluttered.

CHAPTER VIII

GARDEN AND SWORD

To the bustle of Saturday the quietude of the succeeding day was in complete contrast. Beiley spent the morning in the garden and thought it more like Eden than ever; but the intermittent thrusts of recollection did not allow him to imagine himself the Adam to that Eden. Bertha went in and out and around but with a somewhat sedater tread than usual. She was in her Sunday dress, a white washing frock rather short in the skirt, white shoes and stockings, white ribbon to her hair, the beauty of all which lay in their perfect purity.

"We don't wear black clothes on Sundays," she said; "mother doesn't think it right. They put father in the ground, but they couldn't keep him there; he's an angel now, and the grave where he was is all grown over with sweet-williams—father's name was William—sweet-williams of all colours. Do you think the angels sowed them?"

"What do you think?" said Beiley, for the first time in his life deeming a little child's fancies of more importance than his own clever conclusions.

"I think they did; because he'd know it would please mother. And angels of course can get seeds for nothing."

"Where do they get them from?"

"Out of the gardens in heaven. Anybody can pull the flowers there; whole handfuls; little children too. They're not like the Duke's gardens; there are not

so many gardeners but more flowers, specially sweet-smelling flowers."

"How do you know there aren't so many gardeners?"

"Because there aren't any weeds. Oh, I've thought about it since father went there. But now I've got to learn the collect for the day."

So she tripped into the house for her Prayer-book, and conned her task as they paced the garden walk with her eyes partly on the print and partly on the flowers. Beiley had to explain to her the meaning of "mortal nature," first putting back his feelings and understanding some twenty vain years.

"It's what we are," he said, "before we become angels."

"Then father hasn't 'the weakneśs of our mortal nature'?"

"No."

"I'll run and tell mother that; p'raps it will make her not cry."

She ran in and presently returned with an expression of incomplete satisfaction.

"I told her. I said, 'Jack says so, and he's a man.' She kissed me, but she was busy; I couldn't see her face."

Soon she put the book in his hand and he heard her repeat her task; perfectly except that she said "help of thy face" instead of "thy grace."

"I think I like mine best. Faces do help, you know. Yours helps to say collects, and mother's helps to learn history and wash dishes; and I think God's would. 'Grant us the help of Thy grace.' What does 'grace' mean?"

"Favour."

"It would be nice to be God's favourite, wouldn't it? He could let us off such a lot of things."

"What should you like to be let off?"

"Beetles, and bicyclists, and bad temper, and wet weather, and"—her little face took a graver cast—"and black clothes."

She repeated the prayer to him and quite correctly.

"Now I must go back to mother. She has got nobody but me, you see; and I've got nobody but her and dolly. Dolly's asleep all to-day. She hasn't a very strong contistution and needs a great deal of rest. But as I tell mother, she'll grow out of it."

After luncheon she spoke to him through the window as he sat smoking a cigar.

"Aren't you going to church, Jack?"

"I'll go if you'll take me."

"Oh, I always take mother, you see; it's a long way and she needs so much 'tention."

But she did not go; she stood viewing him, taking him in with her serious blue eyes; then said very deliberately:

"If you'd walk on the other side and not talk more than fair shares, p'raps I could manage both of you."

"But perhaps your mother would object to that arrangement, and besides I haven't a change of dress."

In a little while Bertha was at the window again.

"Mother will be very glad of your company, Jack, and the dress doesn't matter in the least. Does dress matter where you live?"

"More than anything."

"It doesn't here. For last Sunday Mr. Pirrie said the only adornament necessary was a putrified heart. Haven't you got putrified hearts?"

"Not in the sense Mr. Pirrie meant it."

"We have. But we wear our best dresses too."

The little child walked between her companions. In appearance they chiefly were supporting her. Beiley held one of her hands and listened to her prattle, but did not talk more than fair shares; hardly so much. The widow held the other tiny hand and the disfigurement of secret tears dried off her face. Fair was the day, fair the tree-bordered road. Trees were everywhere in their spring garniture. The rising ground on their right was decked with wood; on their left were the waters, rush-lined, in long succession, of an up-dammed

stream, and beyond them the spacious lawns, the thick plantations of the park. It was quite a mile and a half to the church, but the way did not seem long even in the afternoon heat. During the latter part of it the woods receded.

The dozen scattered farm-houses and cottages and the humble little stuccoed church were in restful disproportion to the magnificent ducality of the surrounding properties. The bell was bobbing in the belfry as they walked up. Bertha made her friend note the dial set in the corner of the western gable over the porch.

"That's the time in heaven; it isn't quite the same as the time on earth; and they don't have any night-time there, do they?"

"No."

"But mother always sets her watch by it, because it's father's time."

As they entered the lowly porch the little maid twitched his sleeve to bespeak his attention, put herself up a-tiptoe and whispered:

"The weakness of *what* nature?"

"Our mortal nature."

A tiny church as unadorned within as without; unless indeed there be reckoned among church decorations the devout attention of the scanty congregation; two or three farmers, their wives, sons and daughters, two or three sunburnt labourers with their families, one or two aged men and women, unaccompanied; the whole thinly distributed among a score of narrow pews divided by a little aisle. When the rest of the congregation said Beiley did not say, and when they sang he did not sing, but he ever heard Bertha's bird-like voice saying or singing. He expected her collect, in which she did not forget "the weakness of our mortal nature"; he had not taken so personal an interest in any religious service so long as he could remember. The sunlight streaming through the narrow window made Bertha's hair and the clasps of the big Bible gleam.

Mrs. Houghton lagged after the benediction, so that

they were the last of the little congregation to leave the church. She went aside from the path towards a quiet corner of the churchyard behind the church.

"We always go there after church," said Bertha. "*He's* not there; we go to look at the sweet-williams."

"I'll go on a little way," said Beiley, "and wait for you in the lane."

"Don't you like sweet-williams?"

"Yes, but not so much as you and your mother do."

"Uncle George wanted us to go and live in London, but of course we couldn't go and leave Ned Smith to look after them."

Then she went to join her mother behind the church, while Beiley walked on.

In the evening he sat in the arbour reading a local newspaper which one of the motorists had left behind. The sun, having made his peace with both earth and sky, was sinking behind the trees. In the house Bertha and her mother were singing their last hymn, the thin childish treble sustained not overpowered by the fuller voice.

"Night is come and gone is day,
Work is done and done is play;
In their nest
Linnets rest.
God made night before the day."

The simple words and melody, the larger natural influences were more inward to his thoughts than the frivolous letterpress with which they feigned to be occupied. The shadows lurked under the trees waiting to come forth.

"Instead of sun there's many a star;
Where the trees were shadows are;
By his dam
Sleeps the lamb.
Day from night goes never far."

Why should he with the stupidity of habit return to his old dissatisfactions? Why should he not remain there always within the purlieus of that Eden, the com-

panion if not the intimate of purity, piety and content? Where could he find a sweeter solace for his habitual weariness, a kinder concealment for his new disgrace? Such longings whispered not unheard even under the blatant insistence of sensational head-line, capitals, trebled note of exclamation and leaded type. Peeping and advancing, retreating and returning the shadows came from under the trees, stole between the flowers and along the grass.

"My hymn is sung, my prayer is said,
White the sheets are on my bed.
Mother may
No longer stay;
She'll leave an angel in her stead."

But even in the interval between the last prolonged monosyllable and the brief last but one his mind had become fixed as exclusively as his eyes upon the common news-sheet. The coy shadows, the hushed voice of bird and child, the overarching peace, were no closer to him then than they might be, as a poignant recollection, on the morrow, next year, in any number of years. For this is what had caught his eye:

"LORD BEILEY'S DISAPPEARANCE

"It has transpired, that Lord Beiley has been seen and addressed in the Borough of Fordham, by a member of the Local Police Force. Immediately thereafter he took leave of the town in a hansom cab, in the direction of Sherwood, and has been traced as far as Mansfield. A thorough search for his missing lordship has been directed to be made, by his family, in the whole vicinity. It is suggested, that his mental fabric has become unhinged, but from what cause remains to be ascertained. It is certain that, of late, he has consistently been in a very dejected, not to say morose, frame of mind; and it is well known that one of his great-uncles developed an exaggerated altruism, amounting to something more than eccentricity."

CHAPTER IX

THE FAMILY DISAGREEMENT

NEXT morning Beiley told Mrs. Houghton that to his regret he found himself compelled to leave immediately after breakfast. Bertha wept freely.

"If you'll stop, Jack, you shall have lobster salad, you shall have it every day but Sundays."

"I don't want lobster salad, and I should like to stop, but I can't, Bertha."

"Why? You're grown up, aren't you? Oh yes; not such a big grown-up as Tom Webster, but quite grown up."

"Grown-ups, Bertha, have more things and stronger things forcing them to do what they don't want than children have."

"Then why do they get grown up? So they can reach things off shelves?"

"Because they can't help it."

"P'raps they don't try not to soon enough. I've always wanted to be grown up; then I needn't always say 'please.' I *should* say 'please,' you know, but not always; just for a rest, in hot weather. And I should like being cross sometimes without being naughty; that must be very nice. But—are you sure, Jack? Mother needn't stop indoors when the sun shines. She does, you know, but she isn't made to."

"Oh yes, she is made to."

"Who makes her?"

"You'd better ask her."

The little one ran out to the kitchen; and presently returned with a still more dejected mien.

"She says nessity makes her. I'd sooner be made by mother than nessity. I can sometimes beg off a bit from her; when I'm on her knee I can sometimes whisper in her 'yes' ear, so that her 'no' ear can't hear. But I don't know nessity; I shouldn't know where to go; I shouldn't know what to say. I'll stop a little girl and always learn history and common objects."

During this psychological discussion Bertha's tears had dried, but they fell anew when her friend finally took his leave. For a keepsake she put on his little finger a ring of blue beads threaded by herself on horse-hair; he took off his ruby ring and hung it on her thumb. Again and again he promised to return. She gave him one parting kiss and twenty more. She finished her cry on her mother's knee.

Only an hour or two later Mrs. Houghton had a visitor, a middle-aged gentleman in tall hat, black coat, yellow kid gloves. He was driven to the door from the direction of Mansfield in a hired fly, and had manners at once business-like and urbane. He asked to speak with her in private and was at once admitted to the little parlour.

"You have a gentleman lodging with you, Mrs. Houghton, I am given to understand."

"I had, sir, but he has left."

"When did he leave?"

Mrs. Houghton hesitated.

"Before I answer, sir—excuse me—I should like to be assured that I'm speaking to friendly ears."

"A perfectly proper stipulation. If any one may claim to be a friend of the gentleman in question I may; I am his agent and solicitor."

"He left only an hour and a half ago."

"In what direction did he depart?"

"I cannot say."

"Do you know anybody to whom I could apply for the information?"

"My little daughter—but there was an unusual confidence, even an affection, between the gentleman and her, sir, and——"

"I beg you, Mrs. Houghton, not to hesitate to give me all the assistance in your power. I will earn your confidence by confiding in you. My inquiries concern the honour of a noble family and the welfare of my client himself."

Bertha was brought in, pale and shy, and the question was put to her.

"Did you notice, dear, what way Mr. Jack went after he left you? He desired her to call him Jack, sir."

The little maid looked at her mother inquiringly, looked at the strange gloved gentleman uneasily, looked at the floor doubtfully, then at her mother again expectantly.

"Would Jack want me to tell, mother?"

"I can't say, dear. This gentleman must answer you."

"Certainly, little one; certainly, Mrs. Houghton. Be assured that I am furthering his best interests in these inquiries I am making."

"Kindly answer the child's question like a child. Would he want her to tell?"

"You can readily understand, I am sure, that a person's desires may so conflict with his best interests, that his friends may be in duty bound to do honourable violence to them."

"Quite so, sir, but I can hardly presume to be so friendly with the gentleman as to take so much upon me."

The lawyer turned his attention to the child, but so that he could also watch the effect of his words upon the mother.

"Listen to me, little one. If you saw your friend Mr. Jack doing himself some harm—cutting himself with a knife, say—wouldn't you try to stop him?"

"He wouldn't," answered Bertha with a shy decision; "he'd be afraid of frightening me; he'd be very careful not to frighten a little girl."

"But if he didn't know that you saw him?"

"He'd know I shouldn't be far off. I never was very far off."

Her eyes filled again at the recollection of her loss.

"But you are a long way off now, and out of sight." The tears that were brimming fell. "Won't you, if you possibly can, try to save your friend Mr. Jack from hurting himself?"

"Is Jack going to cut himself?"

"Not precisely."

"What is he going to do?"

"Irretrievably damage his reputation, I'm afraid."

Bertha looked her body over, little arms, slim trunk, slender legs, but finding no part or member answering to the name of "reputation," said:

"Does it hurt much?"

"It hurts worse than anything to a well-constituted mind."

"Has Jack got a well-contistuted mind?"

"I hope so."

"Do you hope it'll hurt him?"

"For his ultimate advantage."

The child looked at him doubtfully, unconvinced yet alarmed.

"Sir," said Mrs. Houghton, "the child doesn't understand. You wish her to understand, don't you?"

Two pairs of candid questioning eyes were levelled at the man of business; one blue and just at the height of his own as he sat on the low chair assailed him with a terrible directness; the other grey from an altitude of some two feet galled him sorely with a dropping fire of gentle reproach. He acknowledged to himself that his position was untenable, and sounded the retreat to his wiles.

"Certainly I wish her to understand me. I just mean this, little one, that we friends of Mr. Jack desire to stop him from doing something that will make people think ill of him."

"Will people think ill of him?"

"Everybody will."

The little one, lifting one small hand as high as her head, made outbreak of an impetuosity hitherto latent.

"No, everybody won't. For I won't. Never. And when Jack comes back I'll tell him. Before he comes back I'll write and tell him."

The gentleman rose, as though acknowledging defeat. But as he did so his eyes caught the gleam of the ring on Bertha's thumb.

"What is that, pray?" he said.

"Jack gave it to me," said the little one.

"May I see it, young lady?"

She put it in his hand.

"Undoubtedly the property of my noble client. A ruby of the value of seven hundred and fifty pounds. If you will allow me, madam, I should advise you to take care of it until your daughter is of an age to appreciate it."

Mrs. Houghton seemed disturbed, even distressed.

"Oh no, sir! If it is so valuable I shall be obliged if you will take charge of it yourself, and return it to the too generous giver."

Since Mrs. Houghton withheld her hand he put the ring on the table.

"I can't do that. I should be exceeding my duty and should unforgivably offend my client, if I were to offer to resume his gift."

And so he took his leave.

The same evening a family council was hurriedly called at a Nottingham hotel; the Honourable George Beiley and Lord Cheddar, uncles on the paternal and maternal sides respectively, Cousin Gerald, next to the title, Cousin Victor, Aunt Aclom and Lady Sally. Lord Hexgrove declined to be interested, his mood being that of undivided anger, unmitigated even by his wife's querulousness.

"If it were necessary to find him in order to cut him for ever," he said, "I could understand the use of this meeting; but I don't see that it is."

But the Countess during a breakfast-table exhibition of lachrymose fortitude had insisted on giving her daughter the support of her company. Indeed it was her belief that Lady Sally's resolution had all along been but a by-product of her own. At the hotel however she succumbed easily and immediately to an attack of gentle hysteria; so Lady Sally after giving her due attention left her with her maid and faced the gathering alone. Mr. Fasson the solicitor explained at large how matters stood; briefly, in a state of failure so near success as to have the colour of it without the shape. Said Lady Sally:

"I don't understand quite what you're going to do with Lord Beiley when you've run him down. I hope I've got the right word."

"Say 'found him,' my lady, if you please."

"Found? Are you quite sure he's lost? However, when found, what then? Are you going to put him in a cage?"

"Argue with him, my lady, try and bring him to a reasonable frame of mind."

"Suppose they're too wide apart and won't either of them give. He, we know, is as obstinate as a door-post; and from its name I should conclude that your reasonable frame is wooden and a fixture."

"We must trust in the force of reason and moral suasion."

"Which is as good as confessing we've nothing else left to trust in. I take it for granted, Mr. Fasson, you're a dab at moral suasion, you seem to have morally persuaded yourself; but don't you think that you might just as well save yourself so much locomotion, which doesn't suit your sedentary habits, and sit here and reason with this table?"

"Your ladyship counsels us to give up hope?"

"Don't you think it would save your legs?"

"I'd lock him up as a lunatic," said Aunt Aclom emphatically.

"I agree with Aunt Aclom," said Cousin Gerald.

Said Lady Sally, "It'll be quite easy when you've brought him to your way of thinking."

"What better evidence do we require," said Uncle George, who was portly and exuberant, "than his abandoning such a property and such a bride?"

"I make my bow," said Lady Sally, "for the joint compliment, though mine appears to be the hinder end of it."

"Do you believe in heredity, uncle?" said Cousin Victor.

"Our clubs will," said Uncle Cheddar, who was small and concise of speech.

"It appears to me," said Uncle George, "that we've no choice. Or rather that we've the choice between lunacy and something worse."

"If we take the one," said Uncle Cheddar, "we may have the other given us; then we shall have both."

"I wonder what the police are doing," said Aunt Aclom.

"It's a police affair to be a wandering lunatic, isn't it?" said Cousin Gerald.

"Jerry," said Lady Sally, "there's only one lunatic in a family at once."

"A fact, Sally? But that would make them rather noticeable."

"They are, only they don't notice it themselves. Anyhow, there's one thing I've remarked about lunatics——"

"You've studied them, Sally?" said Cousin Gerald.

"I have, Jerry. It's this: you can never prove them to be lunatics without their own consent. And I don't reckon Jack will consent. Do any of you?"

There was silence round the table, as each put in mental balance the imponderability of hope against the elusiveness of forecast.

"Anyhow, even if he does I don't. If you take proceedings in lunacy, understand that I appear as a witness in his favour. I'm not going to pity him, I'm going to pay him out. So, Mr. Fasson, I don't see

why you shouldn't go straight back to town, where you can spare your own legs and tire cab-horses'."

Whence it may be gathered that from a mere butterfly of a girl Lady Sally was developing into a woman with a purpose and a temper. It was understood that she was hoarding resentment against the inevitable day of her again meeting Lord Beiley. When asked why she continued wearing her engagement ring she answered:

"So that I may have it always at hand."

Which could only be taken to mean that she would not be satisfied unless she gave it back as she had received it, face to face and palm to palm.

Her explanation of the delay in the return of the wedding presents as plainly indicated a determination not to accept the part of the jilted one:

"I shall wait until I am able to say, 'Broken off by mutual consent.'"

CHAPTER X

THE WASH-PIT

Lord Beiley was sorry to part with his little friend. Still after he had waved his handkerchief back at her for the last time and the turn of the road hid her black frock and white hand, he again enjoyed the savour of complete freedom, the pleasure of taking his way without the irksomeness of consent or the labour of premeditation, of walking in the shine or the shade without even the obstruction of a sentiment, the formality of a choice. Out of the mere instinct of concealment he entered the planting that almost surrounded the house, and he followed the first path that offered, a carriage drive trimly kept like every other in that great domain. The sun shone; every now and then there was the flash of white from the scut of a rabbit which ran across from covert to covert; and there was woodland scenery as far as the eye could reach. He came to a lodge, but the gate was wide open, nothing was about but a hen with a clatch of pheasants, and he passed on.

He walked yet an hour through the pleasant woodlands before he again reached the road, a hard white road, but always overhung on one side or both by the abundant woods. The sun was approaching noon when he came where a bridge carried the road over a brook. By the road-side there was a wash-pit in which three men and a boy were washing a flock of sheep. The parapet of the bridge being overhung by a tall ash-tree offered both rest and shade. He made no difficulty about accepting the offer; he sat down, lighted a cigar

and looked on. The nearest of the men—his hands were idle for the moment—just said "Mornin', fine mornin'," the others hardly lifted their eyebrows at him. Indeed they were fully occupied. The boy kept the gate of the pen in which were huddled together unwashed ewes and baaing lambs. One by one the dams were caught by a lusty labourer, hustled out and tossed over the brink into the pit. Fain would she have swum into safety had she known where it lay; but again and again she was thrust under by the second labourer with a poise, a long wooden shaft headed with a curved cross-piece. So drowning and struggling she was pushed into the hands of the last of the three, who stood on the edge and turning her about rubbed her well over; then with a friendly shove started her off in the proper direction, and left her to stagger heavily up the sloping outlet and so to the grassy bank; where stood her washed sisters calling for their lambs, while the water streamed from their fleeces.

Loud was the outcry of sundered mothers and babes; the dog barked, the boy whistled, the men shouted and swore, the water gushed and gurgled at the sluice. The willows and alders that bordered the brook made alternation of changeful gleam and shade along its winding course. On the other side of the bridge the waters were gathered by a weir into a lake but just visible amid the thick trees. Between gushing weir and bridge lay a still pool set in a green meadow, and on it a pair of white swans floated; beyond a slender church spire overpeered the trees.

Soon the washing, well advanced at Beiley's arrival, was completed. The up-penned lambs were released; but timid and slow was their recognition of their dank parents, baa these as they might, loud and fussily. Then while the superabundant moisture still drained from their fleeces, the men put on their coats, fetched from under the hedge their baskets of mat or wicker-work, with a brief nod or a gruff word made the new-comer of their fellowship, sat down on the bridge with

their broad backs to the parapet and only their cobbled boots in the sun, and ate their midday meal, bread and fat bacon or mutton, bread and strong cheese, talking at first charily, then more freely of the differences of like things, the similarities of different things. The dog sat facing them with eyes which, apparently unexpectant, were alert to every morsel of bacon rind or bread crust that was chucked his way.

"How often do you wash your sheep like this?" said Beiley.

The old man said nothing.

"This moot be some tailor," muttered between his broken teeth the middle-aged man, who was short and broad and gruff.

"Not above iv'ry two or three weeks," said the youngest man, lanky, talkative and would-be funny.

The boy, puny, tanned and restless, stood and ate with a hunch of bread in one hand and in the other a stone, which he was ever aiming at a bird and ever renewing from a heap of road ballast.

"Why," he piped, "don't yer know that? We nubbut wesh 'em once a year. Often anoo too. I shouldn't care if I warn't niver weshed at all. Thesen's Mester Good'n's ship. Good ship an' all. That were a bum-barrel as I just hulled at. 'Twere a fine miss an' all."

"If yer don't stosh yer gab," said the middle-aged man with an authority evidently parental, "I'll wring yer neck for yer."

"This ale o' Carter's een't worth noat," said the youngest man.

"Is yourn Carter's?" said the middle-aged man. "I wouldn't find it."

"I on'y drink it becos I want the bottle for to put pig medicine in."

"There een't no good beer now-a-days," said the old man.

"The man at the Crown," said the lad, "is a-gooin' to flit. M'appen the new man'll brew hissen. Yer

can't mek good beer be-out plenty o' good malt an' hops; nubbudy can't. My hiney! I welly-nigh het that theer cock-spink."

"Ho'd yer row," said the middle-aged man, "or I'll gie yer a good esh-plantin'."

There was a short space of slow reflective chewing until the youngest man said again:

"There's a unaccountable poor market for wool."

"There is that," said the old man; "there een't no market for noat now-a-days."

"But I don't find as Tailor Matterson charges accordinglye for wer cooäts."

"'Teen't jonnock,"[1] said the middle-aged man.

"M'appen there een't no wool in 'em," said the youngest. "That ud explain it satisfactory."

"'S like as not," said the middle-aged man.

"Funny, een't it? If a thing wants to be o' wool they 'dulterate it wi' summat else, an' if a thing wants to be o' summat êlse they 'dulterate it wi' wool."

"The stores has bin copped," said the boy, "'dulteratin' Farmer Wes'wood's butter wi' Farmer 'Ill's. There's to be a pollicution. Yo can't be summonsed if yo tell 'em it's 'dulterated. Eggs can't be 'dulterated on'y wi' chickens. A tanner I knock that theer blue-cap ower. Oooh! by gosh! 'tworn't *that* off'n it!"

"If yer don't goo soomwheer else an' hull stuns," said the middle-aged, "I'll kill yer dead."

The eating was finished except on the part of the boy, who holding a chunk of bread in one hand and a stone in the other still bit and threw. The youngest man was poring over the shred of an illustrated paper in which his dinner had been wrapped.

"What's this 'ere russiprussity as they talk on so much?" said the oldest.

"It een't russiprussity, it's rissipossity," said the youngest without lifting his eyes.

"Well, what is't?"

[1] Fair.

"Yo wouldn't unnerstan', Sim, if I to'd yer from now till Sat'd'y, an' who'd pay me for th' toime?"

"By what I can mek out," said the middle-aged, "it's the same as that theer fizzle policy o' Joey's."

"An' what's his fizzle policy, Nat?"

"It's a clever fetch o' hisn for to prevent the Jarmans from sellin' uz what we don't want to buy."

"It shouldn't tek a very larn'd man to do that."

"Don't yo mek no mistake," said Dick, just looking up and looking down again.

The heat increased. The men leant more heavily back against the bridge, they fell into silence, their outlook became contemplative. The old man went fairly off to sleep; the middle-aged nodded and recovered himself and nodded again. The dog lay at full length in the midst of the road, but still with a half-open eye upon the ewes and lambs, which had spread themselves grazing along the grassy margin. The shade had stealthily travelled away from where Beiley sat; but he sat on in the sun ever persuading himself that he was about to rise. The boy was at a distance "wracking" with a stick a green-linnet's nest which he could not reach with his hands; Dick was still poring drowsily over his scrap of newspaper. After a while he said in a voice which breaking the long silence seemed sudden and loud:

"They hain't nabbed Vizcount Bailey yit, an' it's my opinion as they wain't niver."

The old man slept on, the middle-aged yawned, the peer said:

"Why do you think so?"

"He'd a bin catched afore now if 'e'd meant to be catched."

"I'm telled," said Nat, "as there's a hunderd pound reward for foindin' on 'im, aloive or dead."

"Indeed?" said Beiley. "And which do they prefer?"

"Dead, I should say," said Dick. "It moot be a sight o' trouble tentin' them quallity mad folk; they

moan't be banged an' bossed, an' they wain't be led or said. Any kind o' corp moot be better nor sich a live un as him."

The old man awoke with a loud snort; the boy drew near.

"What sort lookin' man is 'e?" asked Nat.

"Five foot eight in height-th," said Dick, spelling out as well as he could a description from the sheet under his eyes.

"That sounds loike a quite iv'ry-day sort o' person."

"Ay, 'e wouldn't be mooch to look at any'ow."

"Some lords," said the boy looking round for a mark for his next stone, "is nubbut quite little uns." He aimed and missed. "Golly! if that had het 'im! I reckon it's when they're made lords on after they're growed up."

Beiley slid from the parapet to his feet. The boy turned his sharp restless eyes on him.

"Hae yo iver seed 'im, mester?" he said.

"Yes. Good-morning."

Beiley walked gently up the road towards the sun.

The boy looked after him and suddenly shouted out:

"Mester! Be yo 'im yersen?"

Beiley did not answer but walked steadily away.

"If 'im bain't 'im," said the boy, "I'll be cry-meated. I didn't try mooch, that hull, 'cos 'twere a robin."

"I'll leather yer when I ger up," said his father, "for talkin' so foolish."

"Why d' yer think it's 'im, Lenny?" said Dick

The boy threw his stone deliberately at nothing in particular, hit it, and answered:

"'Cos 'e's gor a blew an' white necktie on same as what it says i' th' paper." He pointed to the scrap of printed paper which lay on the ground. "Teddy White's new necktie's blew, not blew an' white; I seed it——"

"That theer hunderd pound's mine," said the middle-aged; "my lad fun' 'im out."

With heavy activity he rose to his feet.

"'Twere my paper," said his junior, who starting later was on his feet as soon.

"What's the paper got to do wee't?"

"What's your lad got to do wee't?"

The old man came up too, saying:

"It belungs all on's, we're all in co for't, by raison an' by natur."

"If yo stop an' faight now, fayther," said the boy, "the mester ull mizzle."

Thick-head that he was the father saw the force of the reasoning, and turned his ireful face from opposition to his comrade. Both ran in pursuit. The boy followed, the old man came last; the dog seeing the prevalent excitement rushed ahead barking; then stopped and looked back with a what-can-I-do-for-you expression, as if distracted between imaginations of rats, stray sheep, hostile dogs and felonious strangers. At which and the loud holloaing of the men Beiley turned, as the lighter man got within arm's length. But before he had spoken his rival was level with him, so much had greed stood him instead of agility.

"Who be yer?"

"Be yer Lord Bailey?"

As their utterances were simultaneous, so his answer was joint.

"I decline to answer."

The quietude of his speech and bearing abashed them; they stood not knowing what to do except damn the dog for barking; until presently the old man arrived and thrust breathlessly into the conference.

"We mun tek 'im to the pinfo'd," he gasped.

The boy aimed his stone before he aimed his retort.

"He'd ger out; like a scoperell.[1] Fayther, tek 'im to the pleeceman."

Straightway the father's heavy hand was on the peer's right shoulder.

"Yo mun coom wi' me."

[1] A teetotum; used as an example of agility.

As quick was Dick to hook himself to the peer's left arm.

"An' wi' me."

"An' me an' all," squeaked the oldster behind, taking an eager trembling hold of Beiley's belt. "I may[1] a third."

"How can yer?" said the youngest. "Bain't yer on th' parish?"

"That shan't stan' in th' road; I'll goo off the parish."

"Oad Sim Wood'us," said Nat, clenching his fist and gathering his brows, "if yer doan't tek yer damned wezzened oad hand off'n 'im I'll bash yer oad brains out for to muck the ground wee."

Old Sim Woodhouse shrank back but a very little, so nearly did greed balance fear.

"Dick Pres'on, the man's mine; let 'im goo."

"I wain't," said Dick Preston with a rising choleric redness. "M'appen, Nat Ragdale, yo think yo're head Sir Rag?"

The two began to threaten and curse, hustle and haul.

"Listen to me, you two dunderheads," said Lord Beiley; and perforce they listened. "I don't particularly object to going to the police-station with you, since you think well to take that urchin's advice; but understand that I'm not obliged to go and that I go in my own way or not at all. Remove your hand." Dick's hand was off even while he meditated refusal. "And yours." Nat Ragdale's grasp was loosened almost before he spoke. "Now then! Do you wish to go?"

"Ay," said Dick.

"Of coorse I do," said Nat.

"We agree to that," said Sim Woodhouse.

"Then keep that dog quiet and lead the way."

Boy and dog were left in charge of the sheep; the others moved towards the neighbouring village, Beiley

[1] Make.

in the middle, Nat still on his right, Dick on his left, while the old man trotted totteringly in the rear, so close that every now and then his pauper toe caught the right honourable heel. The rustics eyed one another as curs might which have yet to settle by justice of combat the rightful ownership of a meaty bone. When Dick sidled an inch nearer to their captive's elbow than Nat deemed necessary, his wrath was fierce.

"Keep yer distance," he said.

"Who's not keepin' his distance?" quoth Dick, rather in the tone of retort than inquiry.

"Yo bain't."

"Yo're a dalled ligger! An' if I bain't, what's that to yo?"

"Summat."

"Ah? What summat?"

"I'll show you what summat afore I done wi' yer."

"I wish y'ud show uz now. It moot be summat wunnerful, your summat."

"Doff yer cooät off an' try't now. There'll niver be a better time o' day for sattlin' the raight on't nor now."

"I'm a glutton," said Dick.

At the same moment, or it had never been done at all, the two men stepped a pace back and threw off their jackets. They strode up to one another with squared fists; direct was their gaze each into the other's eyes; Dick smacked Nat in the mouth; Nat countered heavily on Dick's body. There seemed every likelihood of a well-balanced contest, for Dick, though of a less matured strength than his antagonist, was more active and had a longer reach. But the boy, who still hovered within shrill shouting distance, holloaed out:

"Oad Sim'll do yer one yit, fayther, if yer don't look out."

The peer had neither looked back nor slackened his going; the old man had with a more tremulous eagerness moved forward to his side; but when he tried to assure himself by touch Beiley edged away.

"I don't want to hurt thee," he squeaked; "I nub-but want to mek my title out."

The two combatants did not waste another glance on one another; they snatched up their jackets and quickly overtook the leaders. Forthwith the thrust of Nat's elbow in the old man's face hustled him to the rear again. They walked on together with unabated hostility but in legal peace. Soon they reached the village. It was hard upon the school hour; the road swarmed with children, who together with what of adult humanity was out of doors gathered about captors and captive as they proceeded to the police-station.

The police-constable was not at home. The three looked at one another nonplussed, incapable of initiative, while they were pelted from behind with inquiry and advice. Beiley grew impatient.

"Allow me to pass," he said, and walked away up the road.

No resistance was offered to his motions, but the three kept close beside him and the rest of the crowd pressed as near as they could. Wherever he went a confusion of dust and voices followed him. That would not do.

"Is there a magistrate at hand?" he asked.

"Theer's the squoire at the hall," said Dick.

"Take me to him."

After going something like a mile they reached the hall. The main rabble remained outside the lodge gates; none accompanied them to the door but crazy Ab Cully. The door opened and admitted them. Nat would have denied passage to Dick and Dick to Sim, but there might be no wrangling there; the footman was as loftily bland to one as to another and all four were admitted. Ab had gracefully baulked her exclusion by saying:

"Goo on in; I'll wait of yer outside an' see as the weather don't mek a fool of itsen."

CHAPTER XI

THE MAGISTRATE

As soon as they were within the wide hall Lord Beiley got separated from the others. He was so self-possessed, they so constrained; they felt that he had slipped from them; they half wished themselves without. They were shown into the room in which the squire transacted public business. The lord sat, the labourers stood by the door and twiddled their hats. Presently the squire entered, a tall grey-haired man with a Roman nose set prominently in a long red face, which was decorated with small close-trimmed whiskers from ear to strong jaw. He inquired Lord Beiley's business, not noticing the others.

"Perhaps," answered the peer, "you will be good enough to put your question to those men."

The squire turned his beaked face upon them. Dick and Nat fell back a little, so bringing old Sim to the front.

"We've coomed about the reward, sir," said the latter; "the hunderd pound. We've agreed wi' wersens, me an' Nat an' Dick, to goo posh[1] for't, jonnock."

"I dunno for that," muttered Dick.

"No more don't I," growled Nat.

"What reward are you talking about?"

"For huz findin' th' mad lord, sir. 'Im theer, sir."

"For *me* findin' on 'im," said Nat, making himself more prominent.

"'Twere me as copped 'im," said Dick.

[1] Shares.

"What mad lord are you speaking of?"

"Lord Billy, sir," said Nat.

"Vizcount Bailey, sir," said Dick.

"'Im as hed a mind to get married," said Sim, "an' a mind and a hafe not to get married."

The squire's red face flushed to crimson.

"How do you know this gentleman to be Lord Beiley?"

"By's necktie, sir," said Dick.

"By'm bein' sich a furrin talker," said Sim.

"He don't deny't," said Nat. "For why? Cos 'e can't."

The squire turned to Beiley.

"Have they rightly named you, sir?" he asked.

"Excuse me," was the answer; "at present I know no reason why I should be asked the question."

The crimson on the squire's face slowly paled to its every-day red, as again he addressed himself to the labourers.

"The gentleman, quite justifiably, refuses either to acknowledge or repudiate the name you would confer on him; but whether or no, you've no right, nobody has, to bring him here without a warrant."

"There were the newspaper, sir," said Dick.

"Wheer be't?" said Nat.

"Lenny kep it hissen," said Dick.

"I'll warm that lad, I will some, when I get within arm's lenth on 'im."

"My good fellows," said the squire, "a newspaper's warrant for nothing but the day of the month, and hardly that. You've committed an assault upon this gentleman, and if he chooses to make a complaint I shall be compelled to listen to him."

"No," said Beiley, "I came here with my own consent or I shouldn't have come at all."

"The luckier you. And now go, stick to your lambs, your rams, your milkers and your stores; you know them, you can't pretend to know the points of a lord."

The squire touched his bell, the footman opened the door; the men slipped out in a sort of huddled disappointment and relief. The squire turned again to Beiley.

"I'm an old friend of Lady Sally's," he said; "if you were likely any time to be meeting with his lordship I should like to send a message by you."

"Allow me to decline a commission so delicate."

The older and the younger man faced one another with equal pride; but while the former was red and angry Beiley's self-possession was pale.

"I was present at that—what do you call it? Ceremony? Lady Sally's demeanour was perfect; everybody else's, I can assure you, was damnably imperfect. There's one consolation; she has got a healthy mind; she neither fumes nor frets. And that sorry scoundrel's wiped off her slate for good and all."

Beiley would not move one step so long as the squire made the least appearance of having anything to add.

"The best anybody present could say for him was that he might have gone mad all at once. Nobody not a born cad would go mad on such an occasion, unless it was with joy; and that nobody imputes to him. Such a sane honest healthy young woman! It was a wonder to see her in the middle of that mob of frantic women and angry men. She didn't even draw her lips; she gave away her pocket-handkerchief to her sister Lady Peggy, she apologized to the bishop, she kept her train out of the way of us men, she kissed her mother, she refused the vestry, and walked back down the aisle on her father's arm more serene if possible than when she entered. What he has lost he'll never know; and thank God, he'll never even have the satisfaction of knowing that he has hurt her."

He seemed to have finished; Lord Beiley stirred; then he swooped down with a sudden, "What do you think of him yourself, sir?"

Lord Beiley stayed his steps.

"Sir, my opinion can hardly have any interest for you."

"True, sir; but for your own comfort, sir. When one has heard of a dastardly action it's a relief to speak one's mind of it; it's an occasion to air those words in a gentleman's vocabulary which generally lie by and mildew; such as cad, coward, blackleg, scoundrel."

"Thank you, if any part of my not extensive vocabulary stands in need of an airing, I must find an opportunity without further intruding on your leisure. In any case I shouldn't consider it a fair opportunity, if the person to be insulted was absent or otherwise debarred from answering. I thank you for ridding me of those clowns and wish you good-morning."

He went out. It was as if his own judgment on his action had been set before him outwardly with the solidity of a material thing; and he liked the appearance of it the worse. He recognized moreover that he had not even gained his freedom by his wreckage; that he was still tied to what he had let go. He walked on many an hour, needing neither rest nor food, giving no heed to the road, taking a great solitude with him wherever he went. Over and over again he acted the late scene, corroborating the insults, magnifying the praise; praise which for a fraction of a second he had thought exaggerated, but which he had accepted as his own.

What finally brought him out of his self-engrossment was the finding himself entangled in a group of men, who stood together on the top of a hill outside a village and looked northwards. What they saw, presently he saw. Once more the eternal, the ever-fresh alternation from the infinite variety of day to the sublime monotony of night had been achieved. A plain lay before him, a half-circle whose sombre extent was only measurable by a far-away gleam on the north-west of the horizon, which at that midsummer season would keep to-day in mind until it was to-morrow.

But what drew his eyes and theirs was neither the

liquid mystery of sky nor the solid gloom of earth, but something hung up between the two; what seemed to be a huge rolling cloud, permeated and fitfully, uncertainly, not lighted but rather shadowed by a furnace-like glow, which here and there stained it the colour of venous blood but nowhere burst through into the appearance of a flame. If fire it was, it was of much greater dimensions than the burning of any ordinary homestead or stack-yard, and besides it lacked that incessant life-like struggle between blaze and smoke which such a scene commonly presents. The air was still; the reek had it all its own way, rose, rolled over and spread, voluminously shadowy; while that dull thin red appeared to have its seat upon the ground.

Said a man close by Lord Beiley's elbow, "It's gotten such a holt, I shouldn't wunner if it never left off while it had burnt out the hull Carr."

"Why don't yer say the hull country and ha' done wee't?" said another.

"Becos I like to say my say by bits."

"Can you direct me," said Beiley, "to a good inn?"

"It depends," said the last speaker, "what yer mean by a good inn. If a place wi' summat swallerable in't will sarve yer turn there's one not above fifty yards off. If yer wants is larger yer must goo furder, to Topley's."

"Kindly direct me to Topley's."

CHAPTER XII

VALUE RECEIVED

BEILEY rose at Topley's next morning refreshed by his long sleep. It would appear that as the eye through long dwelling on one colour may become for a time blind to it, so the mind may fret and fume itself into a temporary incapacity for fretting and fuming. There was a handbill on the breakfast-table promising the railway journey from St. Ogg's to Nesthorpe and six and a quarter hours at the seaside for a very moderate sum. While he ate he was slowly making up his mind to accept the offer. Nothing offended his serenity until the landlord brought in the bill. He put a hand into a pocket with the carelessness of a man accustomed to feel money wherever he touched. The pocket was empty; so was a second, a third pocket and his purse. Eleven possible receptacles for cash he searched, and the sum of his finding was one poor half-crown hidden away in his ticket-pocket. Three weeks ago the mischance would have been so easily remediable that it would not even have amused him, now he could not disguise his mortification, his discomfiture. Mr. Topley stood by and looked on, a stalwart ruddy man in a white duck jacket marked with blood-stains; for he was butcher as well as publican.

"I'm sorry," said Beiley; "I didn't know I'd run so short; I must post it to you."

"We aren't used to giving strangers credit," said the landlord. "What's yer name and address?"

With a repressed repugnance he gave his card; but

it would seem that his lordship's name only added doubt to doubt. In those remote parts a claim to the peerage is looked on with the same eye as a bank-note of a large face-value; that is to say with much scrutiny, nose to paper, with much holding up to the light, much questioning of endorsements, all ending in a final irresolvable suspicion. Seeing which Beiley with some inward grimacing offered as security his watch, which in his search he had taken out and laid before him on the table. But he had yet to learn, that the creditor besides his legal claim to principal and interest has by the custom of the country the right to make his words bare of everything but their meaning.

"Nay," said the landlord, "I ain't no judge o' watches. It looks a fine un. All ain't gold as glitters."

"It cost five hundred pounds."

"Mebbe. If so, how did yer come by't?"

"I bought it."

"How can I know for sureness? Yer might have stole it. I ain't saying."

"It would be useless for me to defend myself against such a charge."

"You can see that? Any'ow I shan't take it. I don't keep no dolly-shop. Yer must send the money. I'm glad yer didn't stop for dinner."

So with a since-it-may-no-better-be countenance the landlord let him go, which he made haste to do after inquiring the name and direction of the nearest town.

"Any'ow 'e ain't a bad-natur'd sort," said the inn-wench to her master. "See! he's gied me this hafe-crown."

"Then, lass, he's gied yer his last hafe-crown. I wonder whether he is a lord as he made out. Ay or no, he shan't leg it to St. Ogg's. Tell Ted to put the pony to the trap, sharply. An' tell the missis to find me some sort o' coat an' hat, quick."

In five minutes the horse was put to, the coat and hat both found and donned, the landlord up-hoisted into the cart, the whip in hand.

"M'appen I shan't be back for dinner, Mary," he said; "I'm going to St. Ogg's."

"Not in them rags," said the landlady shrilly. "I thought yer only wanted to run over to Bringham about that pig or summat."

"Can't stop, Mary; I'm in a fussle."

Down went the whip, off trotted the pony, leaving the mistress in a fume.

Beiley had not gone a mile down the road when he was overtaken by the landlord and invited to mount.

"Joomp up, sir, joomp up. I'm for St. Ogg's myself, so yer may as well go the five miles sitting as afoot. If yer don't mind this here dishabil."

"Not a bit."

"Never knew a man as did except lovyers, tailors, parsons an' sewing-machine touts. With women it's all the tother road; I reckon that's why they call 'em the tother sect. My missis, if I went out of a Sunday without my Sunday clo'es on, she'd look to see the week ayther jib back into Sat'day or give a flying joomp forrards to Monday."

Beiley still appeared to hesitate.

"Never mind them words o' mine. Words aren't stones; yer can't knock e'en a sparrer down with 'em. No words ever roil me to signify except women's words. And for why?"

"I don't know," said Beiley as he put foot to step.

"I reckon it's becos wi' the sheders[1] yer hands is allus in yer pockets. That keeps the fire in. Now if a man's gab goes too fur you've yer fists to fetch it back to scratch."

Topley stopped the cart on some rising ground and invited Beiley to look back, saying:

"Yer can see the fire from here."

Away over the village was that appearance as of mist or smoke which Beiley had noticed the evening before.

"What fire is that?"

"It's the talk o' the country. It's the peat under-

[1] Females.

ground as is afire; it catched fire accidental last latter-end when they was burning the rubbish off, and it has bin burning ever since."

The innkeeper continued talking as he drove on.

"Yon country it lays in is called the Carrs, a terrible flat country. It's a bit o' the fen-land, they say, as was drained by the Frenchies or the Jarmans long before me or you or King Teddy was thought of. Well, if the choice was before me I'd sooner be a hoss an' pull coals up-hill all day long than be a donkey on level ground."

"Speaking as the driver?"

"Speaking as the driver."

Just before entering the town they crossed the river by a bridge, and the sight of it was singularly displeasing to Beiley. The sun was shining and the waves glistening, but he saw it by night, storm-troubled, haunted by wandering ghosts of light and dark.

"Where shall I set yer down, sir?"

He was under a wholesome compulsion to be of the present. He requested the innkeeper to drive him to the door of one of the banks. But with his foot on the first step of the building he hesitated. In the bright sunshine on that spotless pipe-clayed stone his dusty travel-stained boot had caught his eye, and he thought to himself, "I must first get that cleaned." So he turned back.

"I see, sir," said Topley, "yer don't think much to the artchitecter. I don't myself. I've no respect for a place as looks like a Methodist chapel as has sold the pulpit, took down the missionary notices an' gone into business."

"Is this the only bank in the place?" said Beiley, merely by way of saying something.

"No, sir, but if yer want to do a bit o' banking I should say 'Ull. St. Ogg's ain't one o' them plazes where money's a weed; it ain't even a hardy garden flower; it's rather what yer might call a tender 'ot-'ouse

annual. Now 'Ull's a place where, as yer might say, money's at 'ome. I don't mean it's a litter in the streets; but it don't knock a man back'ards there to see the colour of gold."

Under the circumstances the little town was distasteful to Beiley; the quietude of the street, the nicety of the pavement, the curiosity of the maid-servant whom he saw peeping at him through the opposite window. He felt on the sudden a full-grown desire to be at Hull.

"How far is it?" he asked.

"Thirty mile with a bit on. But you're not going to walk it?"

"Why not?"

"Because it's a long road and a dree road."

"Do you know the way?"

"As well as I know my own beer from Joe's. You're bent on't?"

"Yes."

After a fortnight of deliberate irresolution the putting of a decision into a monosyllable pleased Beiley, as though he were at last doing something.

"Well, sir, I've business at Flyby a good few miles on the road; some hogs to look at. I may as well do't to-day as next week—the hogs won't improve none—an' I shall be glad o' yer company."

Beiley mounted again into the trap. One click of the innkeeper's tongue and the fast-trotting pony drew them quickly out of range of the maid-servant's curiosity. Beiley felt the relief of it and took out his cigar-case. He offered his companion the last of the cigars with which his case had at first been stocked, and himself had to be content with one which he had bought at Sopworth. The innkeeper had not yet selected his match, but he had the cigar between his teeth and steeply uptilted towards his nose.

"Sir," he said with an impressiveness that was the greater for the restraint of his voice, "if you'd showed me your cigars i'stead o' your watch I'd have trusted yer for five pounds as ready as for five shillings. I

wouldn't have asked how yer came by'em; I should respect the man—no offence—as had the judgment to steal a bit o' stuff like this."

The pony stepped out at an invariable ten-mile-an-hour trot. The breeze raised by the motion tempered the overkindness of the sun; there was nothing in the scenery to compel attention. The innkeeper's ready conversation was such as did not demand an answer, hardly a listener. Beiley dozed a little, listened piecemeal, answered at haphazard, dozed again. At last on the far side of a little market-town he awoke, completely, finally, with a jerk that gave him a crick in the neck. At the same moment he took out his watch and Topley pulled the pony up.

"It's five minutes past twelve," he said.

"And that's Brigg behind us," said the innkeeper shamefacedly. "I've come ten mile out o' my road. I must have fell asleep trusting to you being awake, sir."

"Well, whether it was accidental or intentional, I hope it won't seriously inconvenience you or your pony."

"Not a bit, sir; he'd think himself insulted if I took 'im out for anything less than a thirty-mile spin. He's got all the spirit of a whiskey-still and the delicacy o' feelings of a maiden lady."

"Anyhow I'm much obliged to you both." Beiley jumped down. "And I'm sorry it's not in my immediate power——"

"Not a word o' that, sir. That cigar ud pay all charges for a drive across the hocean. Keep to the left, cross the bridge, foller the finger-post to New 'Olland, and yer couldn't mistake the road if you'd put money on the event and squared your legs. New 'Olland, remember. Wish yer good-morning, sir."

The innkeeper, who seemed to have lost time to make up, turned his pony round and started briskly off on his homeward journey. Beiley's road rose gradually to a wind-swept wold, plough-tamed and rounded by

the weather, that master-farmer. It was thinly peopled but not desolate, for everywhere it was covered with crops and trimmed by man's hand. The keen invigorating air smacked of the sea. After a three-hours' tedious walk he came to the first village, and two miles on to another, New Holland, as he was informed by a tall and ruddy native.

"Then which is the way to Hull?" he asked.

"Round by the station," said his informant, his finger helping him.

Beiley went round by the station and soon found himself on a wooden pier. Before him, sullenly glistening, flowed a great river turbid with the daily vexation of the tide; beyond which loomed in vaporous confusion the chimneys and spires of a great city. It flashed into his mind that here was water to cross and fare to pay. In his dismay he thrust his hands into his pockets and felt a coin. He drew it out, a half-crown; which he had doubtless overlooked in his troubled search at the inn. Which doubtless the innkeeper had contrived to slip into his pocket unperceived. But he was already on the ferry-boat when he jumped to the latter conclusion; and at the same moment he bethought himself that his benefactor's simulated sleep was but the cover to another act of charity, with such a spasm of angry shame as if he had had a beggar's penny chucked into his hat.

He was glad to be in the crowded streets, they seemed an assurance of his personal insignificance. The half-crown that was not properly his being changed, he thought he could not do better than spend the remainder on a shave and wash and on a cup of tea and a roll at a confectioner's. Then he entered the first bank whose plate caught his eye, asked to speak to the manager, and was introduced into a private room. An unwieldy hulk of a man with a protuberant belly waddled in with difficulty upon two gouty feet. His face was flabbily fleshy, coarsely purple, with blubber lips, deformed nose, bloodshot eyes; and yet there

must have been somewhere a discriminating soul hidden away under that bloated animal, or how could it have earned the wages of bank management?

"Can you offer me any security, my lord?"

"Not immediately, except my signature."

"Under ordinary circumstances that would be ample. Are you prepared, my lord, to confide in me beyond what you have done?"

"I think not."

"Then I cannot do what you desire, my lord. That is all I need say; unless you ask me the reason of my decision."

Beiley felt challenged to ask.

"What is it?"

"My *prima facie* estimate of your lordship, founded let me say on merely hearsay evidence, is that you are an untrustworthy person. It would be a subtlety unnecessary in a banking business to consider whether the incompetence arises from a physical or a moral defect."

"I can't pretend to being able to resolve your uncertainty. I have but to bid you good-day."

"Good-day, my lord."

Beiley went forth in a disturbance greater than any which had yet troubled him. When the squire of Gledham insulted him, there was at least the sorry comfort that the rebuke was under the half-cover of the third person and came from an equal, a cultured gentleman, one akin to himself in blood and breeding. But that bloated hull of a man, that mere husk! And his dissection so swift, direct and remorseless that the knife gave the shock of a dagger! But the street into which Beiley had stepped was a busy one; automatically his outside put on a smooth-skinned usualness, while his inner man was in a ferment. Yet so largely does the animal predominate in our composition that only an hour later and he was chiefly conscious that he was hungry; hungry and without a penny in his pocket to buy bread withal; a condition so strange to his experi-

ence as to have at first something in it of the amusing. But as the day dragged his feet grew heavier, the stones harder, his stomach emptier. He felt more and more aloof from the well-fed citizen who bustled on the pavement, more and more akin to the outcast who sold pennorths of boot-laces in the gutter. He looked with a new pity upon a woman who crawled the street, a grey-haired tatterdemalion, haggard and unwashed, a waif of time. It would appear that the look he cast on her emboldened her to turn to him, to mutter an inarticulate something, to hold forth a hand, a mere claw, fleshless, filthy. He put his hands into his pockets and quickly drew them out again.

"I haven't a single coin upon me," he said, "or you should have it."

He expected her to reflect something of the shame, the consternation that he himself felt. She dropped her hand and turned away without a change on her ashen face, as though refusal were the commonplace of life.

Soon after that a boy thrust a handbill into his hand, and before he had time to drop it the large-lettered heading caught his negligent eye: "Do you want money?" The ensuing "If so——" was of the usual description. A private gentleman with large sums of money else lying idle was willing out of pure benevolence to effect loans of any amount from two pounds to twenty thousand to any responsible person without bond, bill of sale or publicity, and would arrange repayment solely with an eye to the borrower's convenience. An N.B. clinched the honesty of the undertaking: "This is guaranteed genuine. No connection with foreign adventurers whose unscrupulous proceedings have so often been ventilated in the courts of justice."

Beiley was by no means a fool in business matters, but his need thrust his prudence aside; he went straight to the advertiser's address. The street was an untidy hanger-on to one of the busier thoroughfares, something between the belatedly residential and the hardly-yet commercial. The house was of a like

ambiguous character; a largish eighteenth-century erection, certainly English as to the prim façade, tentatively classic as to the stuccoed porch. It had a dirty office-like door-step but a shut door and a bell, under which was the smallest and neatest of brass plates with this inscription, "Mr. Percival."

A maid-servant opened to his ring, and ushered him through a bare passage into a small room so sparely furnished, that when he had sat upon one chair and put his hat upon the other, there was nothing left for the eye but a strip of worn linoleum across the floor and an insurance company's calendar over the chimney. Presently a good-looking young woman entered, good-looking so far as regular features, the full poundage of flesh and the bloom of youth could make her such. She was only just a little too much dressed to be well dressed. In a business-like manner she inquired his business, and hearing that it was with Mr. Percival conducted him to another, a larger room, furnished with some luxury and almost taste. The eye turned from the two or three safes ranged along the wall to rest with pleasure on the massed geraniums, cinerarias and begonias on a stage by the open window.

He followed the young woman round a screen so placed as to intercept the draught both from door and window; behind which he found a pallid disease-wasted elderly man reclining on a high-backed much-cushioned chair before an office table. The young woman before she withdrew placed a chair for the visitor closely side by side with the invalid's. The reason for this arrangement appeared at the latter's first words, "What is your name?" a faint hiss only audible to an attentive ear. He leant back on his chair like one at the last gasp, his face was white and drawn, he hardly seemed to see between his bloodless drooping eyelids; but one of his thin hands lay on the table as it were a-dying, and like a symbol of mortmain held an office pencil, with which when the answer came he wrote in a diary to all appearance automatically. Every now

and then feebly putting forth the other hand he sipped a cup of bovril.

"What do you want?" he hissed.

"To borrow money."

"How much?"

"Say a hundred pounds."

"Security?"

The speaker it will be seen wasted not one hiss of his scanty breath on the superfluous.

"My note of hand. Or you may have this."

Beiley laid his watch upon the table. The money-lender's eye hardly seemed to travel so far.

"References?"

"I have none."

The man's writing-hand feebly travelled the necessary inches and touched an electric bell that was upon the table. The young woman immediately reappeared and came near.

"Take that to Stoll."

Without further indication by so much as the blink of a dead eyelid the girl took up the watch.

"Should you like to go with me?" she said to Beiley. "He's our valuer."

"As I do not know Mr. Stoll, I don't see that it would be any advantage to me."

"Oh, he's the swell jeweller here. Coulson's aren't anything to him; and he has another A1 place at York."

"Thank you, I will remain here."

The young woman went. The money-lender said no more; he lay back with shut eyes, each breath a slow almost imperceptible pant. Beiley felt the contiguity as that of a to-morrow's corpse; he moved his chair a yard or two away; the other made no sign, but lay back and just refrained from dying. Having broken the compulsion to give an ear-strained attention to those weak labouring pants, Beiley had nothing for his hearing but the buzz of a fly that hovered pertinaciously about the cup of bovril; and the flowers being hidden by the screen

he had nothing within sight but the range of safes, a much gilded mirror and the foolish drapery beneath it that hid an empty fire-place; in fine there was nothing to draw him off from the bitter amusement of his thoughts.

At the end of a tedious quarter of an hour the young woman returned, put the watch back on the table and said:

"He says not more than fifty."

The money-lender had hardly seemed to see, hardly to hear, but he immediately beckoned Lord Beiley nearer, and then spoke:

"I'll buy the watch outright for fifty pounds, and I'll give you another fifty for your cheque on your bankers for a hundred. Both or neither."

Beiley was chiefly indignant.

"I gave five hundred pounds for that watch; it's a perfect time-keeper."

The money-lender's eyes were closed, and for anything that appeared his ears too. The young woman stood by and looked on as at an every-day affair. Finally she took on herself to answer.

"Pa doesn't profess to understand watches or jewellery. He considers himself bound by Stoll's valuation."

Beiley looked away from her; he disliked her even more than the gasping flint-skinner.

"I've thirty thousand pounds at my bankers'," he said, "that I should be glad to get three and a half per cent for."

The money-lender lay back and slowly panted, as though entirely occupied with the mere labour of living. Again without haste the daughter answered for him.

"You see, if gentlemen want money without notice and without inquiry, of course they have to pay for the accommodation."

"So it would appear."

With the slightest lift of a finger Mr. Percival signed to Beiley to put his ears forward.

"If you'll give me two days and your bankers' address you may name your own terms. That's my last word."

So it appeared. He lay as though every communication between himself and outward things was stopped; he lay like a house in which there is death, every door shut, every blind drawn, every voice stilled. What Beiley felt was not at all the loss but altogether the cheat; he chafed under the tyranny of his own folly, as those do who pay blackmail for a half-concealment. But even while he was taking it for granted that he could not consent he had consented. Death would have been a less abhorrent way-out for him than to have knocked at another man's door, sat on another man's chair, stripped himself to another man's ear, inquired the price of another man's money.

"I haven't my cheque-book," he said.

"That doesn't matter," said the daughter.

The father seemed to have parted with all his interest in life save for the slight matter of those weak alternate thimblefuls of inbreath and outbreath. She sat at the other side of the office table, took a slip of blue stamped paper from a drawer, in a business-like hand and proper form wrote the body of a bill payable on demand; then put it before her father, who traced his anæmic signature under her vigorous "Value received." Beiley crossed it with his acceptance and the name of his bankers.

"How will you have it?" she asked.

"Ten pounds in gold and the remainder in small notes."

She took cash from a safe and counted it out upon the table before him. Then she had leisure for curiosity; she looked at him with her blue eyes, eyes that never either fired or blenched. He stood and let her look. Presently she said:

"I've often wondered what you had against her."

"Nothing."

"Then you've acted like a fool. Has she money?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"I never asked."

"Humph! Is she good-looking?"

"Yes."

"Nice-tempered?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll never make much out as a business man, Lord Beiley." Her cold blue eyes never left him. "There's only one possible way for you to set yourself right with sensible people; to go one better; marry somebody richer, better-looking and nicer-tempered."

"Where should I find such a paragon?"

Her healthy natural cheeks changed as little as painted ones would have done.

"I'm on offer. I mean to marry into the upper ten. No middle-classers for me, you may go bail for that. I shall have not a penny less than three hundred and fifty thousands on pa's death. Isn't that so, pa?" The money-lender answered with a momentary half-opening of his eyes, a half-audible monosyllabic out-breathing. "I never lost my temper in my life and never shall. You can judge of my looks for yourself. I shall want to spend the honeymoon on a yacht in the Mediterranean; I've always had a fancy for that, and I never let my fancies go. What do you say?"

"I don't like your good looks, I don't like your nice temper and I don't like your money."

Her face showed a cool approval of his directness.

"You've the makings of a man in you yet. I think you're doing wrong not to take me; I should have looked after our estates and kept you out of further mischief. I can manage both men and property. Women I just walk over. I can ride well, play golf, tennis and the piano, and I'm learning to shoot. But I'm not going to puff myself; I shall go off without that. Never mind about saying good-day to pa. It's his heart and complications; he has no strength left over from business for civilities. I really think if he was only to put the

usual number of 'Thank-you's' into the day's work it would kill him in a week."

She accompanied him to the door.

"We'd better shake hands, we're bound to meet again in society. Unless you make an utter mess of it. You don't expect she'll ever have anything to say to you again, do you?"

She was between him and the door; there was no way of escaping the answer.

"I don't."

"Of course not. Well, there must be plenty who'll suit you as well or better. And don't go fooling with financial agents; they're certain to best you. Good-bye; or rather au revoir."

CHAPTER XIII

MAN AND BROTHER

Beiley stopped that night in Hull and in the morning betook himself to the nearest docks. While he walked along the water's side, much elbowed by busier men than himself, and turning over in his mind remote places in the four quarters of the earth to which he might transport himself and his cares—Stavanger, Kurrachee, Odessa, New York—his eye was caught by a large poster affixed to a pleasure steamboat, offering a day-trip to Nesthorpe for two shillings or three according to the accommodation. He remembered that a similar offer had caught his eye the day before. What attracted him was that Nesthorpe was unknown to him even by name, and he felt that a place unknown to himself should be unknown to persons likely to know him. What decided him was that the vessel's steam was already up and the clock within two minutes of the advertised time of departure. There was no time for hesitation; he hastened to take a ticket and go aboard. To a traveller of his experience that paltry passage between mud-covered flats and by a featureless waste was drearily commonplace. Nevertheless the north-east wind fresh to human lungs after its Arctic regeneration, as it cooled his skin so it somewhat quickened his mind and revived his spirits; while the large movements of the sea demonstrated pictorially, however inattentive his eyes and indolent his perceptions, the smallness and transitoriness of the analogous waves that trouble men's lives.

He landed at Nesthorpe pier about noon and walked into the town. He found that it was a mushroom of a

place, small and new and flat and common. What of it was not red brick was brown sand. Swarms of day-trippers encumbered the streets and rioted on the beach. He had a comfortable sense of being from home. He lunched at a hotel and walked out again on the shore. The breeze blew from seaward, keen, salt-flavoured, vivifying. Under a grey sky the grey swelling waters came up in long-ranked waves, slow to break into white with low monotonous thunder. The wet sands glistened wanly. On both wet and dry numberless children, bare and purple to the top of the thigh, ran and dug and frolicked. Only one child stood and was still of all that crowd; stood with a new unused pail in one hand and a new wooden spade in the other and gazed at the coming tide with large grey eyes. He seemed to Lord Beiley to be as much alone there and as separate as he himself was, and he felt moved to speak to him.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

He had to speak again before the grey eyes were wrested from their looking and the mouth just opened to say:

"Don't talk, I listening to it."

Beiley stopped but not long by the preacher of a doleful gospel; stopped but not long listening to a white-faced minstrel, and again to a black-faced one. When he listened without looking he perceived no difference in their music. He watched a donkey under a lady so considerable of person and so voluminous of wrappage, that nothing appeared of him but two up-pricked ears. There being no part of his body exposed whereon to lay the customary encouragement, his motions were only just brisk enough to satisfy a donkey's desire for change of scenery. Again he saw a starveling pony so spirited of return that he gained home a good two hundred yards in advance of his rider. The crowd laughed as though that was what they had paid money to see. He was in the thick of the spectators of a Punch and Judy show when he felt a tug at his coat, looked down and saw the little sea-gazer whom he had spoken to.

"I can't see," said the boy.

Beiley took him up on his shoulder. His own view was blocked by a little clinging arm that held on by his forelock, so that he had to laugh—for he did laugh—by hearsay. He gave the child a half-crown to drop into the collector's cap, and when the last laugh was laughed set him down and said:

"What are you going to do now, young un?"

"I not young; new baby's young."

"Old un, I mean."

"I not old; granny's old."

"Middle-aged one—where are you going?"

"People shouldn't never ask questions."

So saying the child shouldered his spade and went down again towards the wet sea-margin. Beiley walked towards the town, and amused himself by watching the throngs of day-trippers, who were beginning to make betimes for the railway station. The children, weary and bedabbled, were becoming fractious some of them, some quarrelsome, while others with unabated spirits played in and out among the legs of their seniors. The mothers, fearful lest they should reach the station less than the due half-hour before time, hauled the laggards along, and with the same hearty goodwill scolded the cross and the over-lively. Some dozen yards ahead the father with his hands deep in his pockets, if by chance he had not the baby in his arms or the youngest but one on his shoulder, would be trudging stolidly along, pipe in mouth, never looking back, leaving the management entirely to his missis.

Lads and lasses, as yet in the early unacknowledged unassorted stage of courtship, laughed and larked in groups with a good deal of push-and-tumble merriment. Accepted lovers moved amid it all with mutual arms encircling waists. A large Sunday-school party passed by raising the dust; the van singing "Little Drops of Kindness" while the tail sang "Hold the Fort." A drunken man who had lost his hat, merry himself, was the cause of mirth to others. A fox-terrier, quite sober,

ran from cluster to cluster, backwards and forwards, looking for his owner. Touts made profuse proffer of cheap board and clean beds, of meat-teas and mere hot water for large or small parties. At every engine whistle from the sidings near by one or more of the trippers would hurry a walk into a bustle, a bustle into a run. The air was full of the dust and the clamour.

In the midst of it his interest was suddenly stayed. He had caught sight of his own valet but some twenty yards off, coming towards him as if from the station and followed by a boy who carried a Gladstone bag. He darted into the nearest shop, violently jostling somebody who was entering before him.

"Come, sir," said the latter, "this is 'ardly the way to treat a man and a brother's toes and ribs and other valuable property. I hab white 'ands and feelings though my face am black."

He was a man huge every way but particularly about the middle. He wore Christy Minstrel garb; calico trousers striped vertically with red and white, waistcoat striped horizontally with white and yellow, blue cloth coat with large brass buttons, an exaggerated shirt collar that jutted out far beyond his nose, and on his big head a mere doll's hat. His face was blacked; his hands, though uncorked, could hardly have been called white; under his left arm he carried a banjo. While Beiley was apologizing he had a momentary fear that he had been seen through the window; but the valet passed.

"Granted, sir," said the minstrel. "And in token of forgiveness I beg to propose, if you're agreeable, that we sit and eat our plate of beef or 'am or beef *and* 'am at the same table."

For it was a cheap eating-house in which Beiley found himself.

"Willingly," answered he, "if you'll allow me to invite you to be my guest."

The minstrel bowed.

"Sir, you am white man all through. With the trifling and necessary exception of your liver."

There were not many customers in the house at that time of day, but what few there were looked on and listened with an attention which may have tickled the vanity of the mountebank but was displeasing to the peer. He asked for a private room and was shown into a small one looking on a backyard, in which the week's washing hung out to dry. Its floor and furniture showed signs that it was near the end of a busy day, but its air was presently the better for the window which at Beiley's request was opened wide. He ordered the best dinner that the house could provide. The unctuous satisfaction upon his guest's face appeared through its artificial obscurity. The viands placed upon the table were plentiful if not choice, and he ate for both, while his entertainer did little more than proffer and look on. Only once during the meal did he more than momentarily interrupt the play of knife and fork. It was to say:

"By the bye, have you heard the latest, sir?"

"What's that?"

"Lord Beiley's in the town."

"How do you know?"

"Sir, if folks want to keep their secrets the proper colour of a secret, that is to say *in violet*—see the wittikism?—they shouldn't pass 'em through a tallywag office. They've wired for his friends and bespoke appartments for him in Dr. Kibblewhite's private lunatic asylum."

Beiley had a momentary glimpse, vividly, erroneously imaginative, of strait-waistcoat and padded room.

"Is the lamb to your liking?" he said.

"Sir, it reminds me of them happy by-gone days when I was young, tender, innocent and just fat enough to be int'resting."

At last the minstrel had regretfully to decline more of anything solid; he laid knife and fork down, leant ponderously back in his chair and said:

"Sir, I'll deal plain with you; I'm deeply grateful to you."

"Don't mention it."

"Sir, the condition of my waistband at this moment is such, that if I don't mention it there'll be a job for the tailor. To tell the complete truth, I haven't felt such a pleasing difficulty in going all round a meal and keeping there for a month."

"How is that?"

"Sir, the national taste for legitimate music is so on the down-grade that a man of my frame can't keep himself in bread and cheese at it. Social status, cigars and pots of four-'alf, wives and children, houses and furniture, clean shirt-fronts, yachts and yachting costumes, moty-cars, gold tooth-picks and similar necessary luxuries are quite out of the question."

"By legitimate music you mean——"

"Banjo, bones and burnt cork. Them Pie-a-rots are all Tommy-rot; and French Tommy-rot at that. No, sir, take my word for it, the only truly British line of 'igh art is Sambo. When my pal deserted me to put a night-gown on and join the white-faced Frenchies, it almost broke my 'eart. It quite broke my pocket."

Beiley took out his cigar-case, which he had replenished at Hull, and offered his guest a cigar. At the first puff the latter so struck the table with his great fat fist that the empty stout-bottle before him leapt up nerve-shaken, and would have quite lost balance but for the moral support of her half-full sister by her side, whose greater weight and more phlegmatic disposition got her off with a little womanish start.

"Sir, you're a nobleman!" cried the minstrel.

"None of that!"

"The only drawback to this sooty complexion, sir, is that it does pull a veil over the feelings. You can't blush blacker upon black. Can't. I've tried but failed. It puts a point on wit and adds a jinny-squaw to vocal song, but when the heart's brimming over it neither drips a drop nor mops the slop. My lord——"

"My name's Jackson," said Beiley hastily.

"And mine, heartily at your service, my lord—Mr. Jackson—is Sambo. It's the only quid-for-quod I've

been able to get in; the only occasion on which my counter has risen anything like level with your lead. Well, sir, in a brighter and a better sphere——"

"And a more musical? But pray say no more."

"Sir, your word is law with Sambo. I bow to it. Without me rising please understand I bow to it."

The minstrel puffed and sipped for a while; then said with a sigh, half of repletion, half of regret:

"No, sir, the only being in this wide world and spacious firmament who I've what you may call my knife into is Jim Crow, late of Sambo & Co., Limited. I don't by any means mean a carver, nor even such a table instrument as you've just now so kindly—but you've closed my gab, and closed be it. Sir, a cow could sing on smoke like this. But Jim Crow is 'enceforth scrawked out of my books. Now no longer Jim Crow but Monsoo Parley-voo."

There was nothing violent in the man's reproach; rather it had a hoarse full-fed pathos, pleasingly suggestive of the rich ooze of gravy and succulent sauce.

"Sir, two men may get two meals a day each where one ud 'ardly earn a snack. Look how I've been fixed this last month! Had to make the pitch and gather the gapers; had to sing the songs and accompany 'em; had to ask the questions and answer 'em; had to produce the chestnuts and laugh at 'em; had to keep one eye on the first-floor winders and the other on the pavement; had to collect the nobbings—that hasn't been very sweating though—keep the blooming boys in order, humour the rips without offending the flats, and give as good as I got to them Pie-a-rots! Pretty 'ard swot, sir, for average takings of something less than two pence and an assy drop. A cow sing, sir? It ud make a kitchen table rear up on its hind legs and patter like billy-oh. Sir, it strikes me you're an artist yourself."

"What makes you think so? My cigars?"

"Partly, but not altogether. Partly. It ud be a shock to my religious faith if I discovered that puff like

this could get into 'ands as wouldn't appreciate it. But not altogether. There's something in your nose, and something in your heye, and something somewhere else that I can't just put my finger on in words, as whispers to me in thrilling tones, you're a man and a brother. Is it so? Or have I shied at Aunt Sally and 'it Uncle Spankem?"

"I'm afraid it's a miss this time. I've played many parts, both serious and would-be gay; I've compounded jokes and compelled laughter, but without blacking my face. The more's the shame you'll say."

"It's not for me to pile coals of fire on my benefactor's 'ead. Or anybody's 'ead in fact, unless there was 'alf-baked pudding in it that wanted another turn. But you've had drorings towards the part of Sambo? Don't say no."

"I have at this present moment."

The minstrel uprose and proffered his hand, which was accepted.

"A man and a brother," said he.

Lord Beiley had indeed in his youth been a fugitive member of an amateur negro-minstrel troupe, which gave what are called charity entertainments, because as I suppose the audience gave their money and applause out of the same feeling of pure pity. It was a folly which he had partly forgotten and apparently was willing quite to forget; nevertheless the thought had more than once in the last half-hour crossed his mind, that he would willingly have changed complexions with his guest. He had begun to reckon up the difficulty he would have in covering his identity. The threat of a lunatic asylum he regarded rather as an inconvenience than a peril, but a ridiculous inconvenience that was more terrible to him than the most heroic peril.

"I wonder what sort of a man you are when you are washed," he said.

"A very good-looking man, if it wasn't for the pimples," answered the other in all seriousness.

It reminded Beiley of what Lady Sally had once said

to him: "You might be a very good-looking man, Jack, if you would;" and he had disdained alike the compliment and the counsel. The thought that he could so easily distort his recognizable features into blubber lips and sooty hue lifted him into a present sense of security. Then came the ebb of hesitation, as speedily as the advancing wave is degraded into a retreating one. What natural inabilities we have we have educated, others we have made, fostered, carefully developed, until the cultured Englishman of to-day is stopped if a shadow lie across his path. The objections that he uttered were not those that were chief in his mind; nevertheless their counter-noise did something towards stilling the unanswerable whispers of unacknowledgable timidities.

"I haven't an outfit," he said.

"I've another rig-out at my diggings. If they fit me they'll more than fit you. Another banjo too, and bones an' all."

"Oh, I can't play."

"You've got a thumb and a finger, haven't you?"

"Certainly; even eight fingers and two thumbs."

"Then you've more science than you want. You can't play well on the banjo and you can't play bad; you can only play. It's *the* instrument. If every blessed pianner, fiddle, drum and jew's-'arp was at the bottom of another flood, and only one banjo floated atop—and if it didn't it ud be a very heavy wetter—music ud be saved. You can't go wrong on it—I've sometimes tried when something's given my temper a twist, and it sounded beautiful—you can't go wrong, and you can't go any righter than right. Besides three of its five strings are broke; which makes it just ludicrous easy to play. If it sounds a bit thinnish shuffle your clogs as if you couldn't 'elp dancing it was that military, and if it quite breaks down, whoop and holler till your voice is all in bits."

"Sing do you mean?"

"Sing's the professional word."

"I haven't any voice."

"It ud spoil you if you had. All the voice you want is the voice you was born with and squawled with for your mammy. Them fancy singers as gets thinner and thinner as they go 'igher and 'igher, till they squeak out in a hangel whisper at the ceiling, is no good for anything but for to keep the babby quiet. What the public likes is for a man to swarm to the tip-top of his voice, hold on 'alf a mo', beller all he's good for, then drop plump to the ground, on his feet. It allus fetches a clap and a penny or two, and puts the crowd into a good humour for your next jocular joke."

"But I'm no joker; I never made a joke in my life, so far as I can remember."

"You was just born for the job. Them clever chaps as won't be satisfied unless their jokes are made on the premises while you wait are no good in our line. You've the ring all of a sweat-lather trying to understand 'em, when they ought to be doing nothing but laugh at 'em; and that pitch is a dead failure. No, the public likes the old chestnuts they're sure of. A man likes especially to be sure he won't be laughed at if he laughs. I've known a quite free-and-easy sort in private as was as timid of his laugh on the street as a just-out girl. I suppose you could remember a witticism if you'd heard it twenty times in the last hour?"

"If it was bad enough."

"It'll be that, no fear."

Beiley put a finger up to his colourless cheek.

"How do you do it?"

"Cork and beer. Thanks to you, sir, there's all the ingredients on the table before us."

CHAPTER XIV

IN SWEET MUSIC

Lord Beiley's chief persuasive was compulsion; for the man who will not what he should shall will what he would not. He durst not venture into that street again in his own colours; he had as much dread of it as if it were peopled with his acquaintance, their bland faces transparent masks to their abhorrence. His thoughts had gone back from the menace of physical constraint, on better thoughts almost too absurd for apprehension, to that sudden over-balancing glimpse of his valet. Quite an ordinary man was that valet, ordinarily competent in his duties, ordinarily natured and educated. His master had known him in a way all his life; knew his parents, small farmers on one of his estates, and in a way his snuffy old grandfather. He knew the man would be perfectly respectful if they met, would express nothing by word, sign, look; and yet somehow he feared his encounter more than the Earl of Laxton's or Sir Harry Spender's, with whom he had been intimate on equal terms. He had been so born and bred to the assumption of the circular superiority of John Viscount Beiley over plain John Tilt, that the consciousness that there would now be a tacit readjustment of relation between them made his sensibilities as tender to touch as the skin of a whipped colt. But the moon which shines overhead is with one strong pull heaping up the tides both here and at the antipodes; and so in our lustreless human affairs contrary impulses may in the same man cause like effects. He was drawn also by the strangeness, the whimsicality, the perverseness of the idea. It

amused his tedium, insulted his prejudices, widened his severance.

"Show me how you do it," said he.

The eating-house had a bedroom, small but fairly clean, at his service. Sambo hastened to his lodgings and fetched thence what was required. In less than an hour Lord Beiley was travestied into an unbelievable negro; with sooty complexion, swollen lips, calico pantaloons of the national red, white and blue, waistcoat one resplendent green, jacket halved between a furious scarlet and a mild lemon. Only his hair, his hands and his boots showed like himself; and their incongruity heightened the general absurdity of his appearance. He looked in the glass and was satisfied, with that bitter satisfaction which overtakes a man when he is constrained to desire what he would fain abhor.

"Surely," he thought, "I couldn't look more a fool if I were placarded all over with what I've done."

But the universal interest taken in him as soon as he stepped on to the pavement gave him a shock. So feels the timid bather who thinking to step in ankle-deep suddenly finds himself up to the nipples. The passers stopped, they crowded round, they followed. The grey day was drawing to its sombre close.

"Do they always pester you like this?" he asked.

"I wish they did. The last few days they've 'ardly noticed me as much as if I'd been a scissors-grinder or a catch-em-alive-oh."

"Send them away."

Sambo turned to them.

"What am yer a-starin' at? Hab yer nebber seed two private gentlemans a-walkin' out to take the creases from their Sunday clo'es, as have been up the spout ebber since their last jolly good drunk?"

The crowd laughed and pressed close.

"That hasn't helped much," said Beiley.

"Tell 'em you'll call the p'lice."

"I shall call the police if you don't go away," said Beiley with blubber-lipped seriousness.

The crowd only laughed the more, and now straitly surrounded them, a solid obstacle. Sambo stepped on the kerb for the sake of an added three inches of height, then turned about and ran his preluding fingers up and down the strings of his banjo. The wind blew keenly up-street bearing sharp particles of grit that stung the unprotected skin. Down-street a narrow strip of grey sea was visible, which grew momently less divisible from the more diaphanous grey of the sky. He struck up in a battered baritone:

"Clar de road, yo nigger,
Or I tread on yer toe.
Go home to yer ma!
I's in a bigger
Hurry dan yo.
Do you hah?"

"Stop this fooling," said Beiley, "and let's move on."

"Couldn't do it at the price," said the minstrel; "haven't had such a pitch since the drop in trade made black looks as cheap as white uns."

Again he sang:

"I nuffin to do nowhere,
So I mad for to git dere
An' begin for to finish it. Quick!
Cut yer stick!

Out de road, yo nigger,
Or I tread on yer toe.
Be off to yer pa!
I's in a bigger
Hurry dan yo.
Hook it! Clar!"

The subsequent applause showed that the song offered just such an agreement of music and sweet poesy as hit the popular taste. But Sambo knew better than wait until the going-off clatter of their boots mocked the coming-on approbation of their hands. With a tap of his banjo over Lord Beiley's drooping shoulder-blade he bespoke his attention.

"Massa!"

The response was a reluctant "Well?"

"How do yer know it well 'fore I said it?"

"I don't know."

"Den don't gib no mo' sich soft-roed answers 'fore dis dishscrubbinatin' aujence, but tend to me. When am a man most up an' yit most down?"

The crowd's expectation compelled Lord Beiley to play his part.

"I don't know," said he.

"Tink."

"I can't."

"Scrat yer head."

"It wouldn't be any good."

"Nuffin in 'im?"

"I hope there is."

"Bang it gen dis lamp-pos' den."

"What for?"

"Fetch out de idees; like woodpecker fetches lice out a bit o' rotten wood."

"It would hurt me."

"Den your head has feelin's in 'im and nuffin else? Like a turnip head wiv de turnip gouged out? Yah! Haha! Hoho! Hehe! But my colundrium—When am a man most up an' yit most down? Gib 'im up?"

"Yes."

"Dat's what de man say when the tiger ax 'im if 'e raythe be eat raw or cooked. Hehe! Well, a man am most up an' yit most down when 'e am up a tree. What tink o' dat?"

Then under cover of the crowd's hilarity Sambo said in Beiley's ear:

"Off with yer tile, boss, and collect the nobbings whilst I chant 'em something as'll keep 'em here to be shot at."

"Not I."

"Then you've done me out o' two shillings good."

But even while Beiley refused he espied his valet's face in the thick of the throng, and fixed as he thought

expressly upon himself. It was a different face from that which he had been wont to see above the two hands that waited upon him; the two lips were agape with amusement, there was an interested human soul looking out of those two eyes. John Tilt thrust his elbows into the ribs of the nearest pair of bystanders, got a good purchase and levered himself a foot nearer to his master; who durst not stand any longer facing recognition. He took off his hat, turned his back on the valet, and while the minstrel sang a sentimental lay went about in the mob collecting pence. He directed his movements entirely by a desire to avoid his servant; but either he mistook or Tilt changed his position, for presently the two were again face to face. The peer felt a shock as the valet dropped a penny into his hat, then slapped him with jovial condescension on the shoulder, and said in quite another voice than that wherewith he accepted his employer's daily exactions:

"Brayvo, old chappy! I haven't laughed as much this fortnight."

CHAPTER XV

FORCE OF HABIT

He fell into it sooner and more completely than he had thought possible. He even took a sort of pleasure in it, or rather different sorts of pleasure, sometimes bitter, sometimes reckless, sometimes pleasurable; oftener with a composite flavour of all three; mockery mixed in ever varying proportions with self-dissatisfaction and self-applause, with a sense of freedom and a growing sense of safety, with the mere demand of a vacancy to be filled, with pure enjoyment, with sheer despair. He had taken up his lodgings at the little eating-house. He spent the mornings indoors, partly in practising his new calling, partly in such distraction from care as he could get from Sambo's conversation, from a cigar or the indolent reading of casual print. He went forth with his new comrade in the evening, when he felt it easier to face the public than in the brightness of the morning. He learnt to stand up with at least a semblance of fortitude to be pelted by Sambo's jokes, even upon occasion to pick up and pelt back; he learnt to twang a banjo with the assurance that renders skill superfluous; learnt to swell a chorus in that something between a howl and a holloa which passes on the pavement for song; learnt, hardest of all, to allow money to be dropped into his hat, children's ha'pennies, greasy pennies, stingily genteel threepenny bits, the shilling of the out-on-the-spree prodigal, without seeming to resent it.

He really enjoyed those suppers he and Sambo had together in his private room after the day's work was over. His companion's noisy merriment bustled his

thoughts about, not allowing them to sit and mope. He spoke of the humorous calamities and strokes of luck to which wandering folk are subject; of to-day's events and to-morrow's fooling; all with that rudely aimed fun which never stops to measure how nearly it has hit the mark.

Sambo was not always jocular however. One morning after an overflow of merriment more boisterous than usual, he suddenly turned off to say:

"What sort of a big drum should I make, boss?"

"Judging by the outside a capital one, I should think."

"Good! But seriously, boss; not as instrument but instrumentalist?"

"How should I know? I think it will be more interesting to you if you give me your own opinion."

"There was a Salvation lass as I got rather sweet on at Yarmouth last year. She used to speak to us chaps on the sands. But you appear to think my gifts would be thrown away on a drum? Sounds a bit 'oller, don't it? Give me the bones and the banjo for expression, say nothing of the attitudes; I can put anything into 'em from a fun'ral or a judgment summons to a kiss in the corner. I'm not exaggerating, I'm toning down. With them instruments, used legitimately, I can be as sure of making a woman cry when I want to, as if I poked 'em into her eye. I'm not wrong in terming that a gift, am I?"

"Certainly not."

"Thank you. For she told me I'd a call. I wonder whether she knew how well a Salvation bonnet suited her. She wanted me to chuck beer and 'igh art and join the Salvation Army band. I told her it wouldn't be a call, that, it ud be a thundering holler as fetched me out so far. She liked well enough herself to 'ear me sing 'The Medder Way':

'Oh, the hair was sweet!
And stars instead of daisies at our fee—ee—eet.'

I don't think, boss, you've ever told me if you've any decided religious opinions about weekdays?"

"I haven't."

"I have; I prefer 'em kept strictly *as* weekdays. On Sundays I can do with a moderate modicum of alleluia and amen. She gave me her address—in case. You'd have thought I should have lost it hover and hover again, for I'm a demon at losing small articles. Consequence of my size, I suppose, I don't seem able to give the full force of my intellect to anything under 'alf a ton. But it's allus turning up when least expected. It 's just as if it was to be. I found it this morning in my 'bacca pouch; how it got there I know no more than you; and—With your permission, boss, I'll ring up another bottle of ditto. She's littlish, but so good, what there is of 'er, that if there was more there'd be more than enough."

Of course Sambo sometimes mentioned the great Beiley mystery and then naturally his conversation ceased to be amusing, whether he jestingly diagnosed his hearer's mental, moral and financial condition, or balanced a theory of his continued presence in Nesthorpe against that of suicide or foul play. He never spoke of Lady Sally except seriously and respectfully; which in a person of his free conversational style should appear remarkable, even if the fine quality of our ignorance allows us to believe that Lord Beiley's will was therein telepathically imposed upon him.

So it went on for some two months. Every day Beiley questioned with himself, "What shall I do to-day?" and every day his yesterday's doings were the motive of to-day's. For two months or nearly; and one gleamy evening after a sultry day he and Sambo were on the sands amusing a guffawing circle with quip and song. He was singing, to use the common word for a contortion of sounds. Until then Sambo had been unable to persuade him to favour the company with a sample of his solo quality. Then he was singing without persuasion. Questioned thereafter—for he was

questioned—he could only allege that he had seen his agent, Mr. Fasson, earlier in the day; so there we must leave it. He sang the song he had sung on his youthful appearance as a Christy-minstrel; and while he sang the brown sand was before his eyes dotted with moving folk, whose exaggerated shadows were more conspicuous than themselves; brown sand crossed by glistening threads of water, and stretching out of sight between the foam-laced margin of the sea and the low sand-banks sparsely overgrown with coarse blue-green marram.

"I fell in lub wid Dinah
Cos I nuffin else to do.
I fought nuffin could be finer
Dan coo until she coo.

I fell in lub wid Dinah
Cos I nuffin else to do,
So I send an' tell de jiner,
Br'er Cupid, bring de glue."

He turned a little to his left in order to accept a penny from a grimy hand. The grimy hand belonged to a West-Riding mechanic, but him he never saw; for just behind was Lady Sally on horseback. She threw him a shilling and he had to stop and pick it up.

"That's a capital song," she said; "I should like, if you don't mind, to hear the rest of it."

He had perforce to sing, though his mouth was dry and his knees trembled.

"I fell out wid Dinah
Cos I nuffin else to do;
For change am more diviner
Dan one eternal coo."

He kept his eyes turned away from her towards the sun, whose gleam made everything else invisible.

"So I fell out wid Dinah
Cos I nuffin else to do,
An' old Br'er Cupe de jiner
Hain't no reli'ble glue."

"Please turn this way so that I can hear you better. It's a rattling good song and I want to hear the words."

It was Lady Sally's command, so he had to turn, had to face her, had to sing. She sat and ruled her restive horse with the confidence of an accomplished horsewoman; she beat time to the air with the stock of her whip. She was perhaps a little paler than he had been wont to see her, but was otherwise unchanged. He wetted his lips with his tongue and sang on to the end.

"Again I will lub Dinah
When I nuffin else to do;
Her smile will seem de finer
For dat little interloo,
As de white upon de china
For de tiny dab o' blue.

So I'll fall in wid Dinah
When I nuffin else to do;
But fust I'll tell Br'er jiner,
'Don' mix too stiff de glue.'"

"Thank you," said Lady Sally; "I should have liked to hear that chorus once more, but it doesn't seem to be to my horse's taste. However I want you to come up and sing before my hotel while I dine this evening. I like a little choice music over dinner. The Crown Imperial hotel."

"Come? I should fink we will, lady!" said Sambo. "You ain't no Dinah; when you say 'come' we nuffin else to do."

"Thank you; but I should like to have the other gentleman's promise too."

Beiley's dry lips had to part, his tongue to wag.

"I'll come," he said.

"Half-past seven. Don't forget."

She gave the horse his liberty and cantered off.

"Reckon we're in for a good thing," said Sambo.

"Massa!" he cried again in his histrionic bawl, "Massa! Are yer tendin' to me?"

Beiley's eyes were fixed as though she were still where she had been.

"Massa! Massa!"

So Sambo bawled until his ears, not his will had heard, his tongue not his will had answered.

"What is it?"

"Would yer raythe be married to an ugly bad woman what yer liked or a lubly good woman what yer didn't like?"

His thoughts followed her canter along the sandy waste; and at the same time she was before his eyes as she had been, sitting with perfect horse-mastery and self-mastery. Her dark-blue habit, quite plain, outlined so well her lissom figure. He wished he could have offered her a more befitting mount, Witchcraft for instance or Heyday, than that livery-stable hack, ill-broken, vicious-eyed, under-bred.

"Gib him up, massa?"

Sambo prodded him with his banjo until he answered yes. Or was it no?

"So do I, massa; boaf on 'em. Hahaha! Hehehe! Knock de bones about, massa, while I sing yer little song shall make yer laugh udder side de mouf."

The bones rattled; Sambo sang:

"It's only a little while that I shall love you,
Only a little while I shall approve you,
Only a little while that I shall kiss you,
Only a little while shall have you or shall miss you,
Shall weep with you or smile;
For either you will change or I,
Either we shall change or die;
One shall change or both shall die.
So make the most, love, of this little while,
This little, little while."

Did the singer's common voice, ill-mated with sentiment, penetrate so far as the vestibule of Beiley's thoughts? Who can say? He stood as though he heard nothing, only saw; saw a fine face, fine as much in its freedom from all prettiness as from all pettiness; with a fineness which did not depend upon colour of hair or eye, shape of nose, bend of brow, but was expressive of high breeding, large intelligence, undisturbed self-control, invincible honour; a face which he

had seen before and yet had never seen before. Was it a little paler? or not paler? Did that make the difference? Or what?

"What's up with you, guv'nor?" said Sambo in his ear. "Off with your tile and c'llect the c'llection. That old geyser in black silk with a purse in her hand 'll give you sixpence if you 'urry up before she finds the thrip'ny bit."

The nudge of his elbow helped his partner's numbed intelligence. Beiley took off his hat and went round like an automaton among automata.

"Gemplemans an' ladles, I'll put a colundrium to yer. When is a man here when him there, there when him here, upside when him downside, bottom when him top, roun' de corner when yer got him by the button, habbin' a toof out when him habbin' his dinner, sick when him well, dead when him alive? Know? Gib him up? When him absent-minded. Hoho! What price dat for a joke, massa?"

Beiley did not answer; he had walked away towards the town.

"And now, frien's, my partner's just had a talligrub to say he's comed into a fortune of a few billions, so he's goned off to hab a half-pint of fo'penny on tick on the strength of it; and I want to go and see as there's fair play 'tween 'im an' the pot. Fair play's a jewel; I got one in my Sunday go-to-meetin' breast-pin. Don't foller me, chillens. If yer foller Sambo, he got a coloured gempleman friend what'll make it warm for yer somwhere some day."

In spite of the prohibition he was pursued by a lessening trail of admirers as he hastened after his comrade; who however had gained his lodgings before he was overtaken. Sambo went up-stairs to his private sitting-room. Beiley was already stripped of his outside, his hat, his gaudy coat and waistcoat. What may have been within him who shall say? His daubed countenance was incapable of any expression except the vulgarly ludicrous.

"For God's sake," he said, "get me some hot water to wash this cursed tomfoolery off."

"We've done very well with the tomfoolery for to-day, the last pitch totalled two, six and a half; we could afford to knock off for that matter and do a buster, but there's the bespoke at the Crown Imperial for seven-thirty. I wouldn't disappoint her for two bob."

"I can't go."

"It's a promise. And a promise binds a man; unless he can back out same road he come in."

"*You* promised."

"So did yourself. 'Alf a dollar and 'what do you two gents fancy for a wet?'; that's the least I value this engagement at."

"I can't."

"'Can't' be blowed! A man only can't either because he won't or because his properties are uncled. Small-pox is no bar; only the ring ud be so large you'd want a moty-car to collect the inside."

"Stop your confounded fooling and listen to me."

"I am listening. I allus listen best when I'm talking; when I'm not I'm thinking."

"You can go; I shan't."

"P'raps you're used to disappointing females; I ain't."

Beiley need not so have tyrannized over his features; there was nothing outside but a farce of burnt cork.

"Don't answer back, boss; don't kick a man that's down. I confess I have disappointed one; but it was to avoid disappointing all the others. There's no exception without a gen'ral rule; and in gen'ral woman is boss of Sambo. I understand your feelings, boss."

"You do?"

"True fit. A bit o' stage fright, that's all. You've lost sight of the cork. It covers a multitude of pimples. You've got to do it, boss, and you will. To oblige a lady. That's my ultipomatum."

CHAPTER XVI

UNDER DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE

PUNCTUALLY at half-past seven Lord Beiley and Sambo were outside the hotel Crown Imperial, a new erection on the sea front. What distinction it possessed beside that of its brilliant name-inversion, which however was rather intellectual than architectural, came of the number of its windows, the redness of its bricks and the greenness of its paint. The greater part of the ground-floor was taken up by the common dining-room, which was already fully lighted up, and through its open windows was as public to curiosity as the street. There were sundry groups of diners at separate tables; some large and noisy if not merry, others small and quietly intent upon eating and drinking, but among none of them was anything like the face and figure of Lady Sarah Sallis. Sambo however dashed straight off into his opening ditty, aiming it speculatively at the second storey.

"Mary Maria Eliza Sophia,
I've sweltered away for you—
A taller dip couldn't run greasier;
If I don't speak the truth I'm a liar—
Till I only pull twenty stone two,
Lean, pudding and fat,
Brains and 'at;
While daily my stomach grows queasier
And my tongue drier."

Three or four lively young persons in the dining-room started up from table and tripped to the windows. Without there was already a small crowd round the singer.

"Mary Maria Eliza Sophia,
I've swallered 'ole truck-loads of pills,
Tons of powders and hoceans of slop—
If I don't speak the truth I'm a liar—
But nothink relieves these 'ot chills.
If a sneeze they takes off,
They puts on a cough ;
So what offers for a life that's on swop?
Any buyer?"

A waiter flung high the lower sash of a window on the second floor. Nobody came to it, but it was to Lord Beiley as though the whole crowd of his acquaintance were there looking down on him, Lady Sally in the forefront with a face that made all the others seem lifeless rounds and ovals. Sambo saw so much as the open window and the probable listener behind it; he took off his hat, bowed with an upward inclination and went on with his minstrelsy.

"Mary Maria Eliza Sophia,
I've cancelled all of my bets—
All of 'em, that is, what ain't morals—
Got a coffin on the three years' hire,
Made my will and left you my debts.
When you pay don't forgit
To take a receipt ;
It'll be a sweet momentum of our quarrels,
When I'm 'igher."

Coppers came freely from the loungers at the windows; but Beiley picked them up with so careless an eye, that Sambo had to mix practical asides with his professional tomfoolery.

"Massa, will yer answer me dis question dat I's gwine to ax yer? (There's a penny under yer very hoof.)"

"Yes."

"Well? Go on."

"Yes, I say."

"Push up den; hurry 'long. (Wink up'ards at that gal at the winder.) I can't stand here for ebber; shall hab to toddle off 'fore de end ob de year to get boots mended."

"Push what? Hurry where?"

"Be quick an' answer de question dat yer promise."

"I can't until you've asked it."

"Oh, any blame fool can answer a question after it's axed. (Shake yer hat under the nose of that toff with a tooth-pick; he'll drop something in.)"

"I'm not any fool."

"Yo uncommon fool, massa? 'markable fool? strornary fool?"

"Yes."

"Shake hands, massa." Sambo with pantomime of enthusiasm shook the scarcely offered hand. "Proud of de honour, massa. Dem uncommon sorts of fools ain't common in our fam'ly. Well den, de question. Last time I got hooked to be married to a gal—Last time or last time but twenty? I no head for refmetick; it was boiled for a cabbage once in my early old age when we runned short o' green vegetables, an' it nebber quite got over it. Well, last or last but twenty, de nearer I git to dat weddin' cake de better I fink of it. Dat is de better I fink of it as a prospec' and de worse I fink of it as a meal. How d' yer s'pose I got out of it dat time?"

Beiley's eyes were on the ground; but he knew with the certainty of vision that somebody stood at that upper window and looked down, somebody with a face whose terribleness lay not in a vulgarly outward expression of scorn or anger, but in its cleanness and clearness. Still he had to answer, raising his eyes from the ground:

"You asked the girl to release you?"

"Not much ob dat; she'd a wanted back dat half-dollar I borrered."

"It would have been the only honourable course."

"I wasn't on de honable line jus' den. (Don't set that woman as if you'd expected a quid and got a cough lozenge.) I pay my creditors fo'pence in de pound de day afore, so I was givin' de honable a much needed rest."

"You spoke to her parents perhaps?"

"Her pa was stone-deaf, couldn't hear nuffin but 'What 'll yer drink?'; and her ma was allus out washin'."

"Washing?"

"Yes; she partner in a co-op steam sanit'ry laundry. She an' all 'er frien's but one goes and gits togedder; den dey wash de character of that frien' what not dere; patent wet progress, warranted not to shrink. But yer habn't tell me how I git out ob dat ar marriage?"

"I don't know."

"I walked out ob it. Haha! Like Lord Beiley. Hehe! What tink ob dat?"

Then with the coarse only half-human guffaw but just out of his throat, the blubber-lipped grin still on his lips he rose, or if you will dropped, as his wayward way was, into the fancifulness of sentiment.

"We went the meadow way,
Where no gossips are to fear
But the jackdaw and the jay;
Keeping as near
As man and maiden may
Under the large eye of the married day."

The man's street-rasped voice had contrived somehow to disguise its commonness; there was a tenderness that was not simulated in its hoarse pianissimos and rough-hacked tremolos.

"We said one say
A-crossing of the brook—
'Twas neither yes nor nay;
And we looked one look
Half o'er the stile,
And we thought one thought all the seven mile."

Lady Sally had turned away and was lost to the window for a minute or two.

"We travelled hand in hand,
And the yellow-hammer's cheep
Came from a far-off land
Where they neither wake nor sleep.

Oh, the air was sweet!
And stars instead of daisies at our feet."

A waiter came out of the house and pushed importantly through the ring of audience to the singer.

"Her ladyship," he said, "requests the other gentleman to please sing the song about dinner."

He spoke with a pompous delivery and an outswollen chest; ladies of title are not common at Nesthorpe hotels. Lady Sally had returned to the window. There was no resisting the compulsion; Beiley could not pretend to miss the proper concatenation of dinner, diner and Dinah, confused in the foolish waiter's brain. He sang, Lady Sally listened, looking down. Before her eyes was the portion of the sky remotest from the rapture and unrest of the sun, was the flushed sea, were the sands dotted with folk, was the sorry singer just beneath.

"I fell in lub wid Dinah
Cos I nuffin else to do.

And so forth. A tittering white-capped maid-servant came out of the next house and asked him to desist in the name of their lodger, whose musical taste it would seem was nice.

"He says your voice is like a bicycle 'orn with a quinsy."

"I beg your pardon," said Lord Beiley, "I'm doing this at the command of another lady. You'll perceive that I can't desist without her permission."

"What a nice-spoken young man!" said the maid, no longer tittering but admiring, as she withdrew.

So he sang on, and his thoughts were hidden under his artificial complexion; he never once lifted his eyes to the upper window. When he had done, one small boy and the waiter on the door-step clapped their hands applauding her ladyship's taste. Then the waiter again came forward, swollen-chested, and said:

"Her ladyship requests will you please come in and partake of refreshment."

Beiley's reluctant bow was swept out of view by Sambo's ready "Thank her ladyship; her ladyship's very good; to 'ear is to obey," and his readier step forward towards the hotel. He had to follow. They were shown into the large dining-room and seated at a table to themselves by a window. Of the other occupants of the room the younger, giddier or less refined were disposed to be amused; the select few resented the intrusion. A commercial exquisite muttered something about "common niggers," forgetful that the natural thing is yet commoner and cheaper than the manufactured. Two ladies ceased their elegant trifling and began to chew, in the hope that their disdainful rising from the table five minutes later would have the colour of a simultaneous protest. One gentleman, more promptly incensed, left his plate to find and complain to the manageress.

"It was by her ladyship's express desire," he was told; and his complaints and resentments at once collapsed, as though he were but a pin-pricked bladder and they its thin inflation. He returned to table to find his dinner removed, and all his eloquence could get him nothing for his lost plate of green goose, but apologies and an unsubstantial cheese-cake with two pennorth of strawberries by way of dessert. Meanwhile Sambo and his partner dined, and the assembly which had gathered to hear them sing remained in front of their window to see them eat. The seasonable dishes that were laid before them were such as Nesthorpe considered choice, and were always in accordance with Beiley's preferences. His languid habitual preferences in meat and drink had persisted amid his general indifference.

Sambo was like a cow in clover. He enjoyed the flutter their entrance had caused. He ate heartily of everything, and was as ready with the empty glass as the waiter with the full bottle; until the natural red began visibly to struggle with the supposititious black. Every now and then he stopped to pick his teeth, to ease another button of his waistcoat and to dwell for

a minute with a Janus-headed satisfaction on the past and the to-come of the menu. His companion ate little, pecked at the sole, did little more than let the grouse lie on his plate, drank one glass of wine. Sambo bent over the table and said:

"Don't you feel very fit, guv'nor?"

"Quite, thank you."

"Well, I'd struggle to do my duty to 'what we're about to receive,' if I was up to the neck in a bilious bout. To say no to lamb and sparrer-grass is like inviting Providence to take a walk when on your very door-step."

Beiley looking up saw the crowd about the window.

"Pull the blind down," he said to the waiter.

The waiter did as he was bidden. There was a disappointed booh! from the crowd without.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed a young lady at the next table, "now we shan't be able to see anything."

"You mean, Lizzie," said the young man opposite to her, "'be seen by any one.'"

Beiley was not so locked up but that he not only heard, but understood that either result would be the spoiling of a dinner.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Waiter, please to draw the blind up again."

More than one head was turned, but the owner of not one of them succeeded in connecting that quiet high-bred self-assured utterance with the farcical face and the tom-fool's get-up. Thenceforth the speaker let the mob stare and point and comment with an outside of perfect indifference. If he saw them again it was with a glance as casual and uninterested as that which fell upon his plate. Only once again did he speak during the meal and that soon afterwards; to Sambo, who in the short interval divided unequally between the memory of his fifth glass and the anticipation of his sixth was stimulated to ask the waiter her ladyship's name.

"Lady Sarah Sallis," said the waiter, with the look this-way mien of the pointer-out of a notoriety.

Sambo whistled a long low well-sustained whistle, in which was a wonderful blending of surprise, admiration, pity and disgust. But his glass was again full; he lifted it, rose and said to the whole room with the brisk gravity of the lucky man who can combine a duty and a pleasure, sentiment and sensuality:

"To her ladyship, Lady Sarah Sallis. May she never 'ave reason to regret anything more than a certain little incident at a certain little church."

Beiley did not seem to hear; the rest of the room was divided between amusement and surprise. Sambo sat again with an empty glass and a full heart.

"One thing, boss, I'm sure of," he said; "I dare build a house on it; not to sell, for residential purposes."

Beiley cut him off with a prompt "Sh!" so low that it only reached the ear it was levelled at, so peremptory that it admitted neither of debate nor reply. But as a hardy vegetable only sprouts the more freely for a timely nip of the lead between finger and thumb, so Sambo's conversation after that check did but run the more effusively and buffoonishly in other directions. It was pointed chiefly at the waiter, who received it with a mixture of gratification, condescension and official iciness; the latter so incomplete that after he had successfully resisted the irritation to smile at the opportune moment, he would be taken with a snigger or even an open guffaw, when he should have been giving a coldly respectful, undivided ear to the desires, for instance, of the white-waistcoated gentleman opposite who seemed to be perennially empurpled with astonishment at his own importance. But when the waiter was preoccupied, Sambo scattered his jokes and irresponsible chatter right and left, apparently quite indifferent whether they met with response or rebuff. Some fumed, some sat in a specially iced frigidity, some laughed freely.

Dinner however and even dessert had at last to come to an end, though with a leaving of apricots and strawberries. Beiley rose in melancholy silence, Sambo after a hearty "For what we have received."

"Sir," he said, firing his question point-blank at the white-waistcoated gentleman, "do you 'appen to know what it is to be on precious short rations?"

The white-waistcoated gave an indignant snort, which was quite lost upon Sambo, who with his banjo pointing to the menu card and his other hand on his waistcoat continued:

"Because if you don't you can't realize what it is to feel the luxurious inconvenience of too much of all that there under this 'ere."

He slipped a shilling into the waiter's hand with a loud "Sonny, that's for yerself."

"Thank you, sir. Her ladyship desires to see you two gentlemen before you go."

Said Beiley to the minstrel as they followed the waiter up-stairs:

"Of course you won't apologise."

Sambo, who was first on the stairs, turned.

"D'you think I've gone dotty," said he, "like his lordship?"

"I can't say I think you're over blessed with discretion either."

"Discretion? Great Scott! It's the only thing I've too much of, what I've got under my own 'air-oil and what my friends lend me, give me, chuck at me, press upon me, shove down me. If I could allus make as sure of the price of a pot as what I can of 'alf-shares in anybody's and everybody's discretion, I should never want for wet up to my neck, no more than the everlasting sea."

CHAPTER XVII

HER LADYSHIP

Lady Sally stood by the window as though she were still looking down on the singers. She turned however on their entrance, made the just sufficient return with her head to Beiley's silent inclination and Sambo's "Good-evening to your ladyship. I hope your ladyship enjoys the best of good 'ealth." She asked them to be seated and sat herself, still within outlook of the window. Dressed in evening costume of a choice simplicity she offered a strange contrast to her motley company. The throng upon the sands had diminished to a few quiet promenaders. In the sky the white memory of the sun was still stronger than the brightest of the stars, but the proud dark sea had done with the day; and yet it had not taken on the night's repose, for the sound of its perpetual turmoil came through the open window. But what the looker's eyes seemed to rest on was that far-off indefinable zone, where the air's sweet receptivity and the sea's sullen self-sufficiency mingled into an inseparable one.

"First and foremost, your ladyship," said Sambo with his hand over his waistband, "I have to thank your ladyship for what can only be denominated a banquet. Not the sort of banquet I've been most used to, consisting of a vause of flowers, two or three odd knives and forks and a goblet of coloured water; but a banquet which the least you can say is, another 'elping would have been three quarters pain and only half pleasure."

"I'm glad you dined satisfactorily, you and your friend."

Her eyes were for the moment on Beiley, so that he had to reply:

"Perfectly, thank you."

"Oh, as to that," said Sambo, "there's two sorts of perfectly; there's the perfectly of Jonah inside the whale and the perfectly of the whale outside Jonah. Mr. Jackson hasn't many words as a rule, your ladyship, and what he has aren't A1, as you can judge for yourself. There's a deal of difference in gifts, your ladyship. I've known men as their best efforts in 'umour couldn't even excite the smile of pity or contempt, and I've known a man as the audience begun to laugh before he'd made up his own mind whether it was to be 'The Death of Little Jim' or 'They've all got 'em.' Ah, there's very near as much difference in men, your ladyship, as what there is in dinners."

"I see you've had much experience in both men and dinners."

"I have that; and women too, your ladyship."

"There was only that needed to make it complete."

"My experience of 'em begun the same date to a day. My recollections go back to a time when dinners come pretty reg'lar and the rest of the day wasn't all slaps, male and female. But now when dinner consists generally of a little bit on account, I find men short of change and women short of temper. There might be a conspiracy between 'em."

"So you have a quarrel with fortune?"

"Not to-day, my lady; not the day I've met your ladyship."

"I see you're something of a courtier and a flatterer, Mr. —— I don't know *your* name."

"Mr. Sambo, at your ladyship's service; I wish it was Duke Sambo; he'd be yours all de same, body, soul an' grease."

"I won't accept you, Mr. Sambo; you're bought, bought by a little dinner."

"No, your ladyship, not bought, caught. I's like de fish in de water. It am 'tracted fust by de wurrum, don't

deny; but when it hab the wurrum in it mouf an' de hook begin to draw, draw, den it forget de wurrum an' it tummy an' de base sensheral passions; it head take de lead; it am 'tracted only by de gempleman on de bank, for hisself."

"Mr. Jackson doesn't appear to have taken the bait."

"He only nibbled at it, I've swallered it; that's where it is, your ladyship. I'm hooked, I'm a goner; he's hopen to an engagement."

"Your friend appears to know you perfectly, Mr. Jackson."

Beiley was at a loss for an answer, perhaps for the first time. Hitherto habitual self-possession and innate directness had stood him in stead of readiness; now he was dispossessed of himself, had taken a swerve, sat tongue-tied. That he could neither answer a lady's words nor return her look was to him who had held his head so high and spoken so proudly the seal of his humiliation. Lady Sally repeated what she had said; he was pushed to an answer, of the words, not the look.

"I doubt it."

"Oh, boss!" broke in Sambo reproachfully. "I've eat your meat, drunk your drink, borrered your money, introjuced you to the public, taught you impromptu wheezes, sung sixes to your sevens, once so nearly provoked you to a smile that you lost your temper, been your father, sister, mother, brother, friend, bottle-'older, boot-black, dresser, tooth-drawer and fac-total; and yet you say I don't know you. Oh, boss!"

"You seem to be a general doubter," said Lady Sally.

The forced answer came painfully from the dry mouth.

"When a man doubts himself he must doubt everything else."

"And when a man 'angs hisself he must 'ang everything else? Can't quite tumble to it, boss; should rather like to be left outside that there argument."

"This gentleman is your employer?" said Lady Sally.

"Not exactly that neither, ma'am—your ladyship;

we're equal partners in the refined-entertainment-without-coarseness company of Sambo, limited. I call 'im boss becos he's atop of me so cruel in everything except eating, drinking, sleeping, flow of song and 'umour, 'igh art and 'igh spirits. Count 'em on your fingers an' you can't reckon up as there's anything left out of any importance; an' yet there must be something, for whenever the boss chooses to sit I'm there to be sat on."

"You're so willing to acknowledge a riper wisdom?"

"Not a bit o' that, your ladyship. Like every other reasonable two-legged man I allus prefer my own opinions to anybody's else's, when they're given a chance to spread themselves; but I mostly find myself tied to agree to something else before I've sorted 'em out."

"So that you haven't even the dubious pleasure of yielding to superior argument?"

"Which can't give many points to the pleasure of yielding to superior muscle. 'Owever a duberous pleasure's better than none; as the airinaut remarked when he parted with his parachute five mile 'igh. There was a fine view, especially down'ards, but he couldn't enjoy it for looking out all the way for something to sit on."

"Have you been long engaged in your present profession?"

"Long, your ladyship? I sucked it in with my —— I don't say what till one of the baby-food bounders has made it worth my while to be quite sure how I come to be fatted up into the unusual fine infant your ladyship sees."

"And Mr. Jackson is also a veteran artist?"

She had turned towards the peer, but again the commoner took up the word.

"If you was a pro yourself, my lady, you'd never ask that question. Mr. Jackson—I've said it a many times to his face, so there's no 'arm in saying it to your ladyship's better face—he'd be a finished article if he

knew one thing, but he don't and never will; and that one thing's everything—the value of bluff. If you're stuck in a song, reg'lar glued to the ground, look your jolliest, lift your voice and swell yer chest till the blessed sun, moon and stars has to hitch back and give you room ; chant anything as comes into your 'ead, 'Old 'Undred,' 'Imy Skimy,' 'God save the King,' 'Skittles an' Beer.' The more you're out, the more the mugs 'll laugh and think you're in the middle of in. If you've got the worst of a chaffing-fight, winded, on your back, fair floored with a left-'ander on the promontory, look as if you liked it, lay as if you'd got down a-purpose to have the front-winder view of the beautiful blue sky; don't stop to think; shy back anything that's 'andy—the handiest's allus the best in a scrimmage—'Get yer 'air cut,' 'When did they let yer out?' 'A little bit off the top,' and cet'ra. The crowd 'll wait just as long before they laugh as you wait before you rap out. If when you go round you don't take a brown, keep on laughing, rattle the pennies y'ave put in yourself, 'oller out 'Thank you, sir,' 'Much obliged, ma'am,' 'Mr. Bones, please to return his lordship a dollar out of this 'ere 'alf sov,' 'Shall be your way presently, sir;' and the outsiders 'll fight who's to be first to show the colour of their judgment by the colour of their money."

"All that seems very easy, Mr. Jackson."

"Heasy, your ladyship?" said Sambo. "As easy as walking. Heasier, as easy as not walking, ridic'lous easy; so heasy that almost everybody's too clever to do it."

"Why don't you take Mr. Sambo's advice?"

Lady Sally had turned on her chair and so pointedly addressed Beiley that he was precluded from leaving Sambo to reply for him.

"When I know myself to be pitiable I can't stand up and claim to be admired, nor even forgiven."

"Wouldn't it make some difference to know yourself forgiven?"

"Yes, it would make the self-condemnation the completer. Honour isn't a dress that can be put on one."

Lady Sally took out her purse. Beiley rose, then Sambo.

"Shall I see you on the sands to-morrow?"

"For your ladyship," said Sambo, "I'd come with pleasure if I'd rather not. But I rather would."

Apparently not satisfied with Sambo's promise she looked towards Beiley, who bowed. Her gloved hand put half-a-crown in Sambo's ready palm, offered another to the peer's reluctant one. The reluctant palm however did not refuse her gift; the begrimed face expressed nothing.

As soon as they were in the street, "You didn't shine to-night, boss," said Sambo.

"Glad to hear it," said Lord Beiley.

"Glad? It's man's duty to shine. What was blacking and 'air-oil given us for? Treat yerself to a rise, boss. I never saw you look so 'umped. If I hadn't fair topped myself to-night, her ladyship ud have gone away with a very poor opinion of the profession, I can tell you. Didn't I come out be-eautiful with my 'your ladyships'? Never missed a chance, equally as you never took one. A few of 'em sprinkled over your very few and very every-day remarks, boss, ud have passed 'em off; just as a few currans or carraway seeds turns family dough into company cake. But you see, the profession's prime training for mixing on a footing of equality with the hupper ten. In fact a many now of our aristoscrats goes on the stage just a-purpose to get used to theirselves."

They stopped at the door of Beiley's lodgings. Sambo laid a heavy hand on either of his companion's shoulders.

"Boss!" he said with as much emphasis as brevity.

"Well?"

"I should like to be face to face like this 'ere with Lord Beiley. It ud be supper to that dinner."

"Supposing you were?"

"First I'd tell him what I thought about him—it

wouldn't be all eaudy-C'logne—then knock him silly—that wouldn't take much—and leave him in the gutter to chew it over. Boss, that's a straight-up sort o' woman. What do you say?"

"I quite agree with you."

"Boss, what d'you think's my prevalent feeling at the present moment?"

"I don't know."

"Guess."

"I can't."

"Try."

"Not I."

"It's this: that to gain such a woman's love I'd renounce my career and beer, and sink for ever into private life and teetotalism. You don't believe me? I would solemnly. I'm not drunk."

"Good-night," said Lord Beiley.

CHAPTER XVIII

HO!

WHILE Sambo was helping Beiley to dress in the afternoon of the following day, he was unusually quiet. Indeed during the whole of the time that he was mixing in a saucer the peer's professional complexion he was entirely silent; a space of quite five minutes. But he stopped a moment in the process of daubing it on, when Beiley's face was partly natural, partly artistic, and said:

"Boss! What d'you say to Deborah for a lady's Christian name?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Can't say; unless it's because one woman's face sets you thinking of another woman's. But candidly?"

Beiley made no reply. Perhaps he was mentally comparing ladies' Christian names.

"You think it rather too scriptural for common or garden use? I can't say but what I myself"—He went on smearing the sooty disguise over with his hand—"And yet 'Another plate o' that there nicely underdone beef, Deborah'—eh? Or 'A nice afternoon for a bit of a walk round, Deborah'—eh? Or 'You don't 'appen to know where I've mislaid my pipe, Deborah, do you?' Or 'Just one more o' them nobby kisses of yours, Deborah'—eh?" He stood off a little way to judge the effect of his handiwork. "After all, when you come to try it, I don't see as you can't fit any decent words to Deborah just as well as if it was Sally. I think it'll do."

He washed his hands and thoughtfully smoked a pipe while the mess dried upon the lordly face.

"I'm trying to int'rest myself in myself, boss," he said gloomily.

"I hope you succeed."

"No, I'm like a man as can see the end of his own nose; he's not int'rested, he's bored. I wonder what's up with me."

"Possibly my stout last night didn't agree with the hotel wines."

"They didn't. But it isn't that; I know them symptoms."

When next he spoke he had the lordly nose between thumb and finger, barber-wise, and was toning down the over-done complexion with a bit of paper.

"If a young woman was to say to you, 'You'll come back some day; I shall wait for you,' how would it strike you?"

"What do you bead?" said Beiley, the nasal letters blocked by the pressure of that finger and thumb.

"Would it strike you she was playing the game? Or wouldn't you consider she was some'ow getting an advantage of you?"

"Why?"

"That's just what I'm asking you. Would you think it was her fault or yours if you couldn't drive them words out your mind?"

"Yours, for dot actig od theb."

"Would yourself, boss?"

Beiley blessed the concealing pigment.

"Silence gives consent. Boss, I made sure you'd be of my side and you're all of hers. You'll do beautiful. Look!"

He held the mirror so that Beiley might catch the reflection of his artistry, but the latter turned away, saying:

"Thank you, I'll take your word for it."

They went out. The sky overhead was cloudless and yet not clear; the sun gleamed fiercely, yet seemed at times to forget to assert himself; the day was still and sultry, yet every now and then delicate ladies shivered

under their summer muslins. The sea sullenly incoming was mainly of a leaden colour, streaked with obscure red-purples and darkening at the horizon into obscurer violets. A woman's pink dress glared again; a boat in the half-distance was of an intense white, that presently was not so intense; a smoke-spouting steamer further out was almost lost in the haze. On the southern horizon over both land and sea dark clouds lurked like thieves. Many day-trippers had arrived and the sands swarmed with a parti-coloured throng. Bare-shanked women, up-trussed children paddled and shrieked on the edge of the tide; a few daring ones had taken bathing machines and gone in knee-deep. Donkey-riders and donkey-drivers went to and fro with more commotion than locomotion. The faint hoarse singing of a Pierrot quartette mingled with the intrusive bawl of rival photographers, the loud insistence of hawkers, keepers of Aunt Sallies and other purveyors to man's needs or luxuries. There was a band playing somewhere, and the sound of the bass drum was like the thud of far-off thunder.

Sambo and Beiley plied their joint trade and did very well. The afternoon wore on and Lady Sally did not appear.

"I'm afraid," said Sambo, "as her ladyship's going to disappoint 'erself of a musical treat."

Beiley had no such fear, no such hope.

After a while Sambo said again:

"She'll none come, there's a storm brewing. Let's go and have a wet of Bass's; I'm fair hoarse with all this chanting."

Beiley did not go, did not answer. Why? I don't know. There are men who being unable to see down a man's gullet into his stomach think to see through a man's actions into his mind. What he did he did with his eyes either upon the much trodden sands at his feet or on the ever darkening trouble of the horizon. Still he knew when a horsewoman on a grey horse came noiselessly up behind him over the soft ground; knew

as well as Sambo who stood opposite and kept ever on the look-out; knew before a shilling chinked down into his hat among the pennies and ha'pennies. Sambo was singing with appropriate action that favourite comic song:

"Booze don't agree
So well with me
This morning as last night."

But on seeing the lady he broke off with fine tact between the diagnosis of head and of stomach, and rattled through the chorus to his own brilliant squib-work on the bones.

"I'm never again on the loose,
Since tippling is such for me,
Unless I alter my views;
Or I'm very much mistaken.

"If I'm inquired for I've joined the moderate drunkards, sign of the Half Rasher of Bacon.

"No, lushing go to the deuce,
Since it is such for me.
I'm never again on the booze,
Unless I'm very much mistaken,
Or unless I alter my views,
Or Scotch is too much for me."

Whence he glided from the bones and the comic to the serio-comic and the banjo as easily and naturally as the lark changes from his soaring to his descending notes.

"Give back the s'rimps what I've bought yer,
Them choc'late creams give back,
Which I'd never a forked out if I'd fought yer
So soon was to give me the sack."

He looked up at the sky and hoped the rain would hold off until business was worse.

"Give back the wets what I've got for yer,
An' the little suffins to bite.
When I put pennies in the slot for yer,
Yer didn't weigh up so light.

Seventeen stone, 'leven an' three quarters; not so bad for a bantam weight."

Lady Sally seemed to listen with attention, but it could not be known from her face what she thought of the singer's style or selection.

"And now your ladyship would, I doubt not, like to 'ear once more Mr. Jackson's favourite and much admired 'Dinah.'"

"Very much," said Lady Sally.

Sambo tum-tummed a prelude on his banjo and his lordship had to follow with his voice. His eyes wandered over the dark waters; his mind was upon the woman at his back. Her horse, fidgetting and fretting under her, made the nervous bystanders edge away to the other side of the circle, but only her firm handling of the reins shewed that she was aware of his existence. Her pale calm face was as void of approval or disapproval as if she had been listening to drawing-room music in a drawing-room.

"I fell in lub wid Dinah
Cos I nuffin else to do.
I fought nuffin could be finer
Dan coo until she coo.
I fell in lub wid Dinah——"

It was a loud crash of thunder upon a flash of lightning that broke his singing; and as immediate as the thunder on the lightning came the heavy rain upon the thunder. The audience had melted away, as though dissoluble in water, all but the woman on horseback. Beiley after the momentary check continued his song. Sambo, who had put up his shoulders and made as if to run, remained also, glad at heart that the boss appeared to know for once which side his bread was buttered.

"So I send an' tell de jiner,
Br'er Cupid, bring de glue."

By then save those three there was nobody on the sands but one amphibious bathing-machine man. In the distance, almost blotted out of sight by the rain-

mist, were a few umbrellas and the flying backs of women with their gowns over their heads, of crying clinging children and of men whose only defence against the weather was the up-turn of a coat-collar. The rest were huddled moistly together in the shelters, cowered under the pier, in and under the bathing-machines, against walls and fences, anywhere where there was the promise of shelter to one square foot of dripping cotton or saturated woollen. Every few seconds the air was filled by a momentary white flame that revealed nothing; then again the sudden twilight of scudding clouds and pelting rain.

"I fell out wid Dinah
Cos I nuffin else to do;
For change am more diviner
Dan dat eternal coo."

I cannot tell you what Lady Sally's thoughts were, any more than I can tell you whether her horse objected most to the banjo or the thunder, to the comic intention or the deplorable execution. The sands were aswim; where it was not white the sea was of a colour with the clouds; and still Beiley sang his pitiful song to the accompaniment of the thunder and the rain and Sambo's tum-tumming all out of tune; and while he sang, though his eyes were fixed on the sea, his thoughts were all on the woman behind him. With what pale tranquillity she listened, unruffled by the restiveness of her horse, he knew more perfectly than if he had had it before him, for the idea was unmixed with any material irrelevance.

"There's another verse, I believe," said Lady Sally.

The singer was constrained to proceed.

"Again I will lub Dinah
When I nuffin else to do;
Her smile will seem de finer
For dat little interloo,
As de white upon de china
For de tiny dab o' blue.

So I'll fall in wid Dinah
When I nuffin else to——"

All at once, even upon that indecisive word and note, whether Lady Sally was willing to defer the long-drawn conclusion to drier weather and therefore relaxed the compulsion of her hands, or whether that last thunder-clap and the animal's sudden start took her preoccupation by surprise, anyhow off galloped he with his tail to the storm. Some scatterings of the wet sand he spurned struck Beiley smartly in that defenceless part which lies betwixt hair and collar; but the singer did not need the hint; he had ceased on the instant. He tossed his banjo into the air and drove his foot through it Rugby-fashion as it touched the ground.

"Stosh that!" cried Sambo. "Look what you've been and done!" He picked up the broken instrument. "You've put your foot through ten shillings' worth of the primest music in the land. There's no sense in the state of mind that destroys pawnable property. That's where the training of the stage comes in; it teaches a man to express passion without banging anything but bladders; to ramp like a roaring lion up and down eight foot by three of boarding without sending his elber into the cottage wall on the prompt side, or his toe through the granite rock on the right. I'm with you if you like to say, 'Be dashed to the storm that has done us out of another dinner and another dollar', but I keep my feelings and my banjo separate. Where are you going?"

"For a walk," said Beiley.

"For a swim, you mean. I'm not 'aving any; I get more walking than I want on dry land. Look at it!"

But Beiley stayed neither to look nor to combat his partner's disinclination; he walked off down the sands in the contrary direction to that which Lady Sally had so abruptly taken. Sambo, with the broken banjo under one arm, the whole one under the other, stood for a second or two looking after him betwixt mortification and puzzlement, then turned towards the town, the disconsolateness of his wet outside modified by the near

anticipation of a wet inside. Before he gained the pavement the rain ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

The sea, now at the full, reiterated its furious cavalry rushes, which each time seemed to threaten a general victory of water over dry land. Beiley walked beside it, careless of its up-surging advances and its violent retreats, engrossed by his own petty internal tempest, until he came to a watercourse. Our intellectual emotional self is mated with a partner, fleshly and sane, which takes less than a half-share in the common ecstasies and despairs. This latter part of his lordship would appear, probably with some exertion, to have got its opinion of the practical inconvenience of wet feet added to wet body heard through the shrill insistence of what for the time being was predominant; he turned back. Not only had the rain ceased, but the sun, struggling through the broken clouds, lighted up with gleams uncertainly fierce the white wave-crests—white crests to dun waves—and the water-drops on the coarse blue-green grass of the sand-hillocks. By magic as it almost seemed the sands were alive again with a damp and bedraggled mob. Here might be a child crying with the tooth-ache, there a woman who could not forget her damaged feathers and silks, but the mass of them were even more obstinately determined than before to get what fleeting enjoyment they might out of "three shies a penny" and the German Ocean. Beiley was turning back towards the solitude that was behind him.

"Ho!"

At that ringing imperative cry close at hand he stopped.

"Every one that's thirsty!"

He looked. There was a man standing between him and the turmoil of the sea, with his hand up to bespeak attention.

"Come and have a drink!"

Many turned, some in surprise, some perhaps with a ready-made thirst, others out of mere holiday idleness.

"Now then! Who's thirsty? Who'll accept my offer? It won't cost you anything."

"I'm allus thirsty," said a low fellow with a blotchy complexion peering through a stubbly beard. "What's yer offer?"

"Water."

"Oh, water be damned!"

"Nay, there's no damnation in it, not a drop; it's perfectly pure water, fresh from the well of salvation. Will you try it?"

The fellow shook his head and drew a little further off.

"Milk then? I've milk on offer; the sincere milk of the word."

"Milk don't suit my stomach; I can't disgest it."

"Nay, if your stomach's so much out of order I've some wine that's the best of stomachics."

"Wine? I don't mind if I do; just a—— But what sort o' wine?"

"The wine of Cana."

"I don't know it," said the man. Then muttering, "I just thought 'e was 'aving me on," he slunk back among the bystanders.

"The drinks I proffer you, friends, won't taste so hot as your drams of pleasure, nor so sugary as your draughts of ease, nor so self-flattering as your sips of knowledge, but I guarantee that they will both please your palate and appease your thirst; they won't leave you drier than before. There's no salt mixed with their satisfaction. And they won't cost you a cent. Here's neither tithe, pew-rent nor collection."

"Good lawk!" said a loud girl, laughing, "it's a man in his mother's old frock."

"Never mind my frock, sister; I want your ears, not your eyes."

And yet there was something for the eye too in the speaker's pale shaven emotional face, backed by the leaden mutability of the sea; the face of an enthusiast, thin and ascetic, with glowing eyes cloistered under a high white forehead. He was bareheaded, was perhaps

about thirty-five years of age, wore sandals and a monkish gown girt with a cord.

"Look! Yon's the water of this world." His finger was towards the dark turbulent sea. "It is canopied by the storm, bedded on unrest, bitter with discontent; its joy a mere tumult of intoxication, its solace a perpetual thirst, its crowning gift death. There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

"It's a bit of the Popish plot," said a jealous Protestant, who thought that the hood did make the monk.

"I am in a plot, it is true; I have plotted with your conscience, I have conspired with your fears, have made secret fellowship with your hopes and desires."

The Protestant waited for no more; he drew off with his wife and children before they should come under the magic, older, stronger than popery even, of a persuasive voice. The clouds had got reinforcement, the sun had given up fighting against them; only through some weak place in their attack he shot vertically down a scattering of fierce rays.

"Friends, I've a very good opinion of the destiny of this world of ours; because it had the best of beginnings. Well begun, you know, is half done."

"How funny 'e talks," said a hugely fat woman with plum-coloured face and cherry-coloured ribbons. "I don't see as 'e's got anythink to sell unless it's charicters."

"One o' them phonigraphs as feels yer bumps?" said her friend. "Niver a bit on't; 'e's a bathin'-machine chap, I reckon, tryin' to push trade."

"Thank yer, mester," said the plum-coloured one, "I'm not 'avin' non. There's too much of me to wesh it all, even in the sea. If my 'and goes as far as your eyes does, I'm satisfied. 'Ave some nuts, 'Arriett."

"'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.'"

"Give uz your authority for that," said a man with an argumentative voice.

The speaker took a little worn book from his bosom and kissed it reverently.

"That's only 'earsay," said the man; "I wouldn't 'ang a cat on 'earsay." A man with a sallow moustached face, in a decent black coat; might be a Nottingham twist-hand.

"Well, what does authority mean but hearsay? We all live upon hearsay; you who're so scientifically cocksure, just as much as I who am so reverently receptive."

"Yer don't mean to say yer believe as the lions didn't eat Daniel?"

"I do; I'd believe, if this book affirmed it, that Daniel ate the lions. I hear a masculine guffaw, a feminine tehee. Well, friends, I've my equal revenge; I laugh and the ladylike part of me titters when I see you so agape to accept the unestablished."

"I sh'd like a game o' skittles for a quart a damn sight better nor this," said a rough fellow in shabby tweeds and billycock, and moved off with his rough mate in shabby tweeds and cap.

"My gospel is the gospel of my father and mother, my forefathers and foremothers. Your belief will be obsolete in another generation."

"So long's it lasts while I'm dead," said the twist-hand, "what's the odds?"

"You won't be dead. Behold, I show you a mystery."

"Any road I shan't be alive; there's nayther hist'ry nor myst'ry about that."

"'Thou fool!'"

"Fool yoursen!"

"I beg your pardon, I was quoting from this book."

"Granted, an' beg yourn; I were quotin' Narrer Marsh."[1]

"Let's go before the collection," muttered a pinch-mouthed woman to a flabby-cheeked man.

"There isn't any collection; he said so," answered the man.

[1] An unfashionable street in Nottingham.

"You can't ever be sure; it's called by so many names."

"Everything that lives," said the preacher, "suffers a cycle of changes, from seed to flower, from flower to fruit, from fruit to seed again."

"What," answered the twist-hand, "if the flower withers afore it fruits, or the fruit wizzens afore it seeds, or the seed rots afore it spruts? What becomes of yer bicycle then?"

"True; and that's why I'm here. There is a sin unto death."

At which words instead of the black cloud behind the speaker's head was a white instantaneous glow. Immediately the thunder crashed and again the rain fell, with that suddenness which attends the coming of an expected thing. Again the sands were cleared; besides the peer and the fanatic nobody was left but one man, serious-looking, but in the face rather than the dress, and a woman, elderly, narrow-browed, care-worn, yet with the sparkle of enthusiasm in her eyes. The fanatic put his book back into his bosom, went down on his knees, in the midst of a puddle as it befell, remained there a minute with closed eyes and moving lips, then rose. As he moved off Beiley stood directly in his way, stood because impulse he had none sufficient to get the better of inertia. The common eagerness to seek shelter from the rain did not affect him; he could not become any wetter, any more disconsolate than he was. The rain streamed from his ridiculous hat into his ridiculous collar, from his foolish coat-tails to his absurd heels, gathered about his farcical eyes and mouth, dripped from his besmeared nose, chin, finger-ends.

"Well, what do you think of it?" said the preacher.

"I can't swallow your Daniel."

"But a man doesn't live by what he doesn't swallow. You want to believe, don't you?"

"No, there's no sense in wanting to believe what you don't believe."

"But you must believe in something."

"I don't know that I do."

"You must."

"Must," echoed the woman.

"If he must he does," said the man behind.

"A man can't be saved," said the preacher, "unless he believes in something. To believe in nothing is death."

"That's the natural end," said the man.

"Behold the crown of life!" said the woman.

"What shall it profit you," said the preacher, "to gain everything else and lose that?"

"What should I believe?"

"What you're obliged to believe," said the man behind, who had come a little nearer on his left.

"Yes, obliged!" said the woman—she was now close by on his right—in a cooing pleading voice with clasped hands and tears in her eyes; "obliged! Kind Master! dear Lord! sweet Saviour! 'At the name of Jesus every knee *shall* bow.'"

Beiley looked at the one and looked at the other, like a man taken between reason and love, till the lightning flashed and blotted them both out.

"I believe in a woman," he said.

"That's something," said the fanatic; "that's a lot. Oh, infinitely better than if you believed in a man; who might be yourself, and one can't live upon one's self. A woman! Then you believe in the embodiment of long-suffering and self-sacrifice. Brother, if ever in your wanderings you come across one who is man and woman too, you will have found the perfect one; man in strength, woman in love; man to dare, woman to endure; man to be wroth, woman to forbear."

"Man of Sorrows! mighty Saviour! sweet Bridegroom!" murmured the woman with clasped hands and streaming eyes.

"There isn't such a thing as a miracle," said the man behind; "or else everything is a miracle. Everything or nothing."

"I must go," said the preacher. "If I get wet

through my book will get wet. And it was a woman's gift. Good-bye."

He strode off across the water-possessed sands. When Beiley turned the man was gone from behind and the woman from his side. He almost doubted whether he had really beheld and heard, or had but dreamed circumstantially.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SHADOW

WHEN he was weary of treading the heavy sodden sands, weary of contending with the wind, the rain and his distracted thoughts, he returned to his rooms. A letter was awaiting him which had come by the afternoon post. It had the Mansfield post-mark and was addressed to Mr. Jackson in a refined womanly hand, but the enclosure was the writing of a child.

"DEAR JACK,

"Every body dusent for I don't so please come back soon and don't dammidge something I can't spell. I want you to see my white lilys and red roses the sweet williams are still in flour, what a funny word yacth is to spell the *t* always forgets where it ought to go. Mother laught once yesterday. A lady has given me another dolly she opens and shuts her eyes and wants you to be introdust so please come back very very soon.

"Your affectionate

"BERTHA."

The urgency of his preparations, the tyranny of his regrets had to make room for a little dwelling with a mixture of feelings upon that childish scrawl. But he must change wet for dry, wash the disguise from his face and settle with his landlord. He put a ten-pound note in Sambo's hand as compensation for the broken banjo and partnership. Having abundance for to-day and to-morrow it was not in Sambo to be inconsolable about anything, but he felt at least as much sorrow as he expressed at the sudden dissolution of fellowship.

"What's amiss with the place, boss? It's reckoned 'ealthy. At least there's a sight of people comes here with nothing the matter with 'em a-purpose to get cured of it; and I never heard of any as didn't. Feel anything wrong with your 'eart or 'ead, your liver or your bacon?"

"Nothing," said the peer.

"And your pocket seems 'ealthy too, appearantly," said Sambo with a down-glance at the bank-note in his hand. "What more can you want? Change of hair? Well, I'm thinking of going to Doncaster for the St. Leger. Why not stop and go with me, and try whether the musical taste of the Yorkshire tykes is any less abroad at 'ome than abroad?"

Beiley only shook his head.

"What'll Lady Sally say? I thought she seemed to hing on to your lips, in a way of speaking you know; the sort of melancholy far-away mope folks has on their faces when they're listening to something full-fig on the pianner, and dursn't get their 'ands ready to clap for fear of showing they don't know whether them divine strains is the beginning of the end or only the end of the beginning. 'Er 'orse though didn't seem to share her opinion. Blame me, if I didn't think he'd have took his revenge with 'is 'oofs on somebody's dinner-basket. But setting him apart, boss—and it's feasable for you to say he's a vicious hignorant brute—what'll Lady Sally do?"

"You must try to console her."

"I can't, boss. I'll admit, if you force me, as Lady Sally has an admiration for me; but it's the cold admiration of the intellect not the just-out-of-the-oven enthusiasm of the heart. I don't know as I could depend on shillings from Lady Sally, let alone dollars."

"Sorry, Sambo; but it has to be."

"If it has to be, it's no good me buzzing again it. Call at the Sow in Sunshine if you 'appen to be at Doncaster for the races. If you don't see me—which you mayn't if I'm out of sight—any'ow you'll hear about

me. Meanwhile you'll find their 'ome-brewed thruble 'xcellent."

They shook hands and went their several ways, Sambo to get his note changed, Beiley to the railway station. He hastened down the short length of road. His disguise being off he felt as though everybody knew him for the defaulting bridegroom, the suspected lunatic. A train stood in the station with hissing engine and gathering passengers, ready to start; the Lindum special he was told. He set his mind upon escaping by it and hurried to the booking-office.

"First class for Lindum, if you please."

"No booking for Lindum till six thirty-five to-morrow morning, sir," said the clerk.

"There's a train for Lindum now in the station."

"That's a special, sir."

"Give me a special ticket then."

"You can only get them at Lindum, sir."

"How much more is it than an ordinary ticket? I'll pay the difference."

"It's two shillings less, sir."

"Then why can't I pay more and go by it? Is it full?"

"No, sir; but that's the regulation."

"Then your directors insist on their customers travelling further and paying less? They seem to have the business ways of——"

Of that unhappy class for which according to popular judgment he was qualified. The word stopped him, as perhaps nothing else merely verbal could have done, from arguing the methods of a railway company. But a man touched him slyly under the elbow and so drew him a few yards apart.

"Do yer want to buy a return ticket for Lindum?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"Yer can 'ave mine for a shilling; I'm staying the week-end."

The exchange of shilling and ticket was forthwith

made, and Beiley passed the barrier and took his fraudulent seat in the train just as it was on the move. During the journey the sun set in a turbulent admixture of clouds and glory, and it was fully night when he arrived at Lindum. To the collector he tendered half-a-sovereign in lieu of ticket.

"You'd no right to travel without a ticket," said the collector; "you're liable to be charged, you know. How did you manage to pass through?"

"On false pretences," said Lord Beiley.

And the collector was so much struck by the naked simplicity of the plea that he gave the change and passed on.

Beiley's purpose, deliberately pieced together in the train, was to pass the night at one of the Lindum hotels, cross the country next morning to Liverpool and thence sail into concealment. But like the exulting ship which is by turns the pet, the plaything and the prey of the billows, so a man's resolve boasts itself upon sufferance of underlying passions, which sometimes sleep, sometimes surge, now support or even speed, and again vex, scatter and destroy. He took the first turn that presented itself, though evidently leading away from the main streets and the better hotels. He did not turn again and in about half-an-hour found himself outside the city's limits. The lamps, the houses, his fellowmen were behind him, and before him, so far as he could see, nothing but an uncertain road, the sombre fields, the cloud-peopled sky and night.

He walked at an even pace, neither slow nor fast; foreseeing, dreading what he was journeying towards, desirous of return, but not daring to show his cowardice even to himself. So on he went, and ever as he walked darker grew the prospect. It was a night of spectral undetermined shades. Such thrice-strained light as escaped through the clouds' dark moving masses was but enough to mark them off from the solid blackness of the earth; the glimmer that uncertainly divided the next few yards of splashy road from the inseparable

darknesses on either hand seemed to come from the ground itself. The frequent jagged lightning that played on the horizon gave a leer of cruelty and falsity to night's frown; the wind filled the air with voices that threatened, voices that forbade; each hedge-row tree as he approached it hinted itself against the sky with a large indistinctness, appearing to rise out of the ground like a gesticulative ghost. And the basis of his self-assurance had been shattered.

Until his late meetings with Lady Sally his breach of faith had appeared to him, according to the shiftings of his mood, as an escapade—a sorry escapade, it is true, not to be boasted of—as an act of gross folly, almost of madness, or again as an inexcusable lapse from mannerliness. At length he understood that it was a crime; against her; and what he was perhaps last in seeing, was certainly most surprised to see, against himself. Each tree wore the black face of his self-judgment; the clouds were as cursory spectators, derisive, condemnatory; the lightning was like arrows of introspection aimed from without.

Hour after hour he walked, surrounded by those external signallings of his own doubts, fears, reproaches. He passed through villages, but the shadowy houses gave him no more sense of fellowship, were hardly more visible to him than the shadowy hedge-rows. The scattered clouds joined hands and covered the sky; the wind had dropped, the rain fell. It was the dead of night; road, hedge, field, were but one black blot. Only upwards could he see a little further into the obscurity than he could reach with his hands. He walked by chance, sometimes on one side of the road, sometimes on the other, stumbling over unseen obstacles, splashing into a ditch, colliding with a hedge; from which once and again a startled bird flew out, vociferous, unseen.

In the midst of it he heard a dead sound on the soft road indistinctly separable from his own footsteps. He looked and saw moving in line with his own motions a

shade, uncertainly human in form. It did not speak. They walked side by side, he and the shade. Sometimes he doubted whether it were not his own shadow, the footsteps were so hard to separate. At last at a turn in the road it spoke, in a man's rough voice with a country-like accent.

"Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Beiley. "You were long in speaking."

"Was I, sir? Mebbe. I'd my tho'ts." And Beiley had had his, though he did not say so. "You're out late to-night, sir."

"I might retort, no later than yourself."

"Ay, but——"

The answer was broken; though perhaps it was only incomplete because the face was unseen. They walked a stretch in silence, side by side, step for step. At last Beiley said, just to brush through the gathering constraint of such a fellowship:

"A dreary night."

"What meks yer think so, sir?"

"The rain, I suppose."

"It don't touch me."

"And the darkness."

"If 't 'ad been light I mun a been at work, and then I couldn't——"

The break was again the signal for a space of silence, as side by side they walked, neither seeing the other's face. At last the man said in a tone between revolving and resolving:

"I mayn't hae another chance."

That was all; he continued walking as before, what contention or indecision there might be outwardly expressed being as invisible as the workings of his mind. After a while he said again, in a voice resolved but low:

"Beg yer pardon, sir, but I don't know yer voice, I can't see yer face; if ever we meet i' the light I've noat to reconize yer by. Are yo i' love with a woman?"

The man waited for an answer and presently the answer came.

"I am."

"I'm i' that form that I mun speak to somebody. There's a thing happened to-night as is too much for one heart to hold. There's summat i' yer voice as gies me confidence."

He paused for a minute, as though to make separation between that and this, between the vestibule and the shrine.

"She gied me a kiss."

They walked on. The silence seemed to brood over what had been said. Out of the darkness the man had made for himself a little tabernacle of light and love. Beiley said, but not at once:

"I wish you both happiness."

"Thank yer, sir, thank yer; for her an' for me. I am happy. Noat can now befall to mek my happiness sorry. Unless—unless oat was to happen——" His voice which had been shaken by a momentary doubt recovered its solemn cheerfulness. "But e'en that ud be by the will o' God."

They walked on.

"I walked sixteen mile out," said the shadow with the man's voice; "this is the nint o' the sixteen back. I've seven more."

He spoke as though the miles were so many links in a precious chain.

"It's a long way," said Beiley.

"I wish it had bin twice as fur. I should have had so much longer to hope and fear afore, so much longer to dwell on't and to wunner afterwards."

Again they walked in silence. Doubtless the man was dwelling on it, dwelling and wondering.

"May I ask your name?" said Beiley.

"Jack——"

But the rest of the name, disguised perhaps by the broadness of the accent, he did not catch. On they walked. A strange fancy came over Beiley amid the

deceptions of the night, when what is is concealed by what is not; he felt as though it were himself who was walking by his side; himself with narrower opportunities and a larger fulfilment; the himself that might have been, that ought to have been. So illusion-wrapped did he become, that there was a time, as they walked and walked, when the shadow was as substantial to him as the fact; he thought the shadow's thoughts, shared in his wonder and delight. But his actual despair was there too, poisoning the sources of life, transmuting its gold with a worse alchemy to fumes and dross.

"Woman's a delicate-made thing, easy offended, easy hurt."

So said the shade with hushed voice, as though he feared that even at that distance mere breath might hurt, might offend. Beiley said neither yea nor nay. On they went.

"I mun bear it i' mind."

"You will."

They measured several miles together, the shadow and he, with no more words than have been written; until at length the shadow said with perhaps a slight slackening of his stride:

"God bless yer both, sir; her and yo."

A tremour shot through Lord Beiley, of joy and agony, at that solemn putting of himself and her together, as though it made momentary marriage of their names. He knew that the time of parting had come, and on an impulse gave utterance to something of the wildness of his thoughts.

"Is her name Sally?" he said.

Some of his agitation seemed to be communicated to the shadow and its words were broken.

"Who are yer? How hae yer gotten inside me? What meks yer to say that?"

"Because my name's Jack too."

"Ah? And yo come from her?"

"Yes."

"Then yo know."

The shadow's feet came to a stand.

"Yo're for straight forrards, sir?"

"Yes," said Beiley, as though his path were mapped.

"Then good-night."

"Good-night."

Two hands belonging to undistinguishable figures met in the dark, one rough and laborious, the other smooth and delicate, then separated for ever.

CHAPTER XX

UNDERGROUND FIRE

Lord Beiley went straight forward, as though his path were mapped. The rain ceased, the clouds fell away, day was at hand; for the hedge on his left was just perceptibly less in the shade than that on his right. First there was the long slow unreckonable increase of light; and then that daily miracle, the sudden triumphant forth-flashing of the sun; but within his soul there was no defeat of the night. Birds awoke and shook out their damp feathers; beasts arose from their hedge-side lairs, stretched themselves, sniffed at the dank herbage and began to browze; men came forth with to-day upon their faces, having slept off yesterday. He alone still lived in the day that was dead, suffered from its hostile weather, drank its unrefreshing water, ate its unnourishing bread.

He came to a town, but whether it was large or small did not appear, for the way that he took, or rather the way that took him, glanced aside from the thick of the houses, led to a bridge over a river and so out again into the open country. He knew the river again at a glance and acknowledged its presence with a shiver, which may have been partly owing to the chilliness of the morning; for the sun was already overcast, and a variable breeze that now contended and now flagged blew out of the south-west. He had no clear understanding that he had walked that road before, nevertheless he knew that there would come a juncture, in a few yards, a few miles, many yards, many miles, when he

would turn on his right. The juncture came, after a time long or short, and he turned on his right. By dint of bodily fatigue he had succeeded—if success it can be called—in numbing his higher sensibilities. He still felt, but as in a narcotic dream wherein the fleshly pain was a confused one with the mental distress. He saw everything, reasoning upon nothing; and ever he had that odd sense obscurely anticipatory of what was yet out of sight.

He passed through one village and yet another. At the second village he would have entered the first inn, but two men stood in the doorway and the obstacle was sufficient to deter him from the attempt. He went on his way; and having traversed the village came, as he foresaw, to the brow of a hill commanding a wide prospect. He looked to see a group of men there gazing northwards. The men were absent, but what they should have been beholding was not wanting; the far-off appearance of a thick vapour or smoke. He was in that state of mind in which turning back is the supreme difficulty; he walked on downhill.

From the bottom of the hill the road traversed a country of perfect flatness, black-soiled, intersected by drains. It was indeed a piece of reclaimed fen-land, locally named a carr, which generations ago had been laboriously banked off from the river, drained and brought under the plough. The road, as roads are wont to do in that region, degenerated into a lane, the lane into a cart-track; and ever before his eyes he had that appearance of localised mist or rather smoke. He had not the opinion of his nose, the smell being wafted away by the breeze; but smoke it undoubtedly was, arising from the ground, for as he drew near the air was quite still for a time, and the pother divided itself into many sky-pointing columns of diverse shapes and sizes; which when the breeze stirred again, again bowed their heads. The capricious puff died out; the columns began to rear themselves. But no! the breeze was only playing at bo-peep; once more they stooped under its

buffet, lower and lower, perforce, until their severalness was lost in the general fume.

All that was seen by Beiley, but passively; it left no mental impression. In the same way he had seen the canal lock that marked the first mile, the farmstead that marked the second, the little row of labourers' cottages that marked the third, had seen the tramp into whose hand he had dropped a coin of uncertain value, and again that other farmstead wherefrom a dog issued to bark at him. This last evidently was close by the reek's place of origin, and a few yards further the track was barred by a gate. The tramp stood with the coin still in his hand, looking back at him. The wind being quiet the smoke had again slowly lifted itself out of a confused oneness into many heads. A dull red glow underlay it, which seemed to shift its place. It now filled his nostrils with a pungent peatiness; but its imminence affected him as little with fear as with curiosity. If he thought about it at all he set it down for one of those burnings of hedge-cuttings and harrow-collected weeds, which are seen on every hand what time of the year the harvest is gathered in and the guns fetched out. Only he should have remembered if he had had his wits about him, that it was yet but mid-August. The crop in the black field which he had just passed had not been cut with scythe or reaper and peacefully led away, but had been levelled by fire.

He opened the gate; he was incapable of turning back. The pother being temporarily less he could see the track alongside a drain. He followed it. He heard a loud holloa behind him but gave it no attention, as men will do who are unused to being holloaed after. He passed by two pillars of smoke; the others seemed to stand off; he did not dream of danger; the heat and the reek were but unpleasant. Again he heard a shout behind him. He looked back, but a fog had uprisen between him and the rest of the world. He was vaguely uneasy, but before he could either return or walk on the wind stirred again; he was immediately involved in a

dense smoke, blinding him, choking him. A third time he heard that loud holloa and feebly answered it. He was wishful to return, but even with the help of that loud voice could not tell the direction. He blundered hither and thither with a hurried uncertainty, shouting between gasps, trying to avoid the heat and smoke and appearing to get more into the thick of them. What the ground now gave forth was not mere vapour, but fire that scorched his feet. All at once it opened under him, let him in up to the arm-pits, hugged him in a fiery embrace. His voice was cut off; the cry for help did not leave its place of birth. The pain of burning was less than the pain of suffocation. For a brief while; then he ceased to struggle, ceased almost to feel.

Suddenly his uplifted hands were seized; he was roughly dragged half out of the pit, as roughly let slip back into it. The pain of it, the hope of it brought again his half-gone consciousness. Through the smoke he saw a something more substantial than smoke, a something which bent over him like the umbra of a man, seemed to take hold of him, seemed to sway with a great effort, seemed to draw him, draw him up. Half out he was sensible of a check. Was he to lapse again? No, he felt the effort that drew him renewed, redoubled; the manlike something above him shook with it. The next instant he knew himself to be rescued, confusedly, without detail; and then with the pain and with the shock of the escape he lost consciousness. His rescuer ripped his jacket from him and wrapped it about his smouldering stockings. Then twice he holloaed, aiming his voice across the reek with his hands about his mouth for speaking-trumpet. The answer was a single dilatory "Hello!" from a distance. He shouted a third time; and again the same deliberate answer came after a while from a somewhat less distance.

"Come an' lend us a hand!" cried the rescuer.

"Who are yo?" was the answering question from yet a little nearer. "I dunno yer voice."

"What's the bloomin' matter o' that? There's a man 'ere's got burnt."

"Be yo all raight yersen?"

"As right as anyfink; I'm enjyin' myself proper. Come an' jine the tea-party."

The breeze was then still; the smoke rose again columnar from the reek-holes. Presently through it another form loomed, a yokel with a sheep-hook in his hand. He stepped slowly forward with heavy-footed gingerliness, but when a score of yards off stopped short.

"Guy, what a poother!" he said. "Is 'e dead or what?"

"'E's what, 'e ain't dead," said the first man. "Come forrards an' let's 'yst 'im on to 'is legs."

"I ain't coomin' no forrarder. It's again my principles to come so nigh'and as this. I've a disloike to burnin'; allus hed."

"Come along, yer cake. 'E can't stan' of 'isself."

"Yo've got singed a bit yersen, ain't yer?"

"I'm rippin'. Come on, I tell yer; it's as good as booze."

"If yo're all raight theer, stop theer. I'm all raight 'ere, an' 'ere stops I. If yo want me yo mun coom to me."

"I can't lift the man alone. I'm burnt myself."

"Didn't I tell yer? Yo should a stood an' hollered, loike me. I ain't coomin' no furder. If I got my clo'es burnt or mysen burnt, my missis ud call me. Besides I've a disloike to't."

The breeze blew, the smoke again drifted along the ground, but the rescuer, though evidently in pain, managed to raise Beiley to a sitting position. The latter, thus roused, gave a half-conscious assistance in the hoisting of himself to his feet.

"'Oller," shouted his befriender, "so's we can tell where y'are."

"I'm 'ere!" said the yokel without raising his voice inconveniently. "But I'm non stoppin' 'ere. I don't

loike the esh an' the smoke, an' I've gotten a yowe to cap as has the mawks."

"'Alf a mo', we're a-comin'."

Beiley was able under support to stagger so far as the obstinate countryman, who then did not object to go to his other side and help lead him away. It appeared that Beiley had so nearly succeeded in zigzagging across the burning close, that they were then on the far side of it. A few yards took them out of it by a gate leading into a grassy lane.

"'E looks a poor cratur, 'e does," said the yokel disparagingly.

"You wouldn't look so 'andsome as what yer does, Johnny," said the other, "if you'd bin where 'e's bin."

"I ain't bin theer," said the yokel, with emphasis too slow and tepid to be called triumphant. "It's a funny thing, 'ere I've lived next door to the fire for six month an' never so much as tho't o' gettin' burnt; an' this furriner comes, as has no 'casion to come as like's not, an' dang me if 'e bain't in't up to th' neck-ull in no time."

"Ev'rybody ain't got your gifts, Johnny."

"What d'yer mean by my gifts?"

"Yer boots, Johnny."

"My name ain't Johnny," said the rustic stiffly, apparently in circumlocutory resentment of the reference to his boots.

"What is it then? Christipher? Gustus 'Enery?"

The rustic hesitated, as though in slow doubt whether his name were worth more as a secret or a boast; then said as though in mere sluggish yielding to the difficulty of the doubt:

"It's Tom."

"Tom? Ah! Once knowed a chap o' that name, the biggest thief ever I set eyes on; it makes me one o' the fam'ly to yer, Tom."

"There ain't non of our fam'ly tramps."

"No, I reckon your fam'ly name 's Stick-ith'-mud."

Tramp the latter speaker evidently was, from the

battered motorist's cap, somewhat too small for him, that crowned his close-cropped hair, to the down-worn heels of his slip-shod shoes. His tall thin narrow-chested but wiry person was clad in a black frock-coat much too loose, frayed and grease-spotted, a grey waistcoat almost new, and an old pair of checked trousers out at the knees, one leg of which was braced so much higher than the other that it showed a strip of white skin, fresh probably from the St. Ogg's workhouse bath, between ragged woollen and dusty leather. Being such he was taking an unusually high tone with the yokel, who to judge by his better-tended person was somewhat above a labourer in degree. Apparently the common difference between them had been levelled by uncommon circumstances. But Beiley was alive to nothing but the pain of his injuries and of the motion, as his supporters laboriously led him down the lane to a house set back from it, a cottage with outbuildings on a small scale at the rear. As they turned in at its gate the countryman said in a colourless tone, neither forbidding nor encouraging:

"I don't promise as she'll let yer in."

The woman was at the door before the knock; a short thick-set woman who filled the doorway.

"What's agate now?" she said sharply.

The tramp answered; the rustic left supporting Beiley's other elbow and stood back spectator-wise behind him; the dog, a grey-coated sheep-dog, remained by the gate, distantly curious.

"This chap's got 'isself burnt on the Carr, ma'am; bad."

The woman looked his lordship over with little eyes deep-set under a bit of flinty forehead. Coatless, hatless, with singed stockings, his shirt, skin and hair fouled with ash and smoke, he would not have looked prepossessing to the most favourable scrutiny.

"'E don't come in 'ere," she said shortly and sharply; then aimed a fierce glance over Beiley's shoulder to the rear. "What business was't o' yourn, that yo need

put yer interfairin' finger in't?" Her eyes returned to the tramp. "Tek 'im to t'ospital. What's t'ospital for?"

"Who's to take 'im, ma'am? It's ten miles good, an' I'm burnt myself."

"What's that to me? I didn't burn yer nor yit get yer burnt."

"I should like to sit down," said Lord Beiley; and immediately falling away from the tramp's insufficient support sank to the ground in a faint.

"Yer see," said the tramp. "Come, ma'am, yer can't give a pore chap a bit o' kindness, if it's only a crust an' a corner, but what it's returned yer."

"Who'll return it?"

"The county council," was the prompt and unexpected reply. "Yer exes if e' lives an' a suit o' mourning if 'e dies. That's the law. But if 'e dies an' yer don't do what yer can, y'ull 'ave to bury 'im yerself. That's the lawr of the land."

The woman stood, but her ill-balanced ignorance was shaken even by the impact of an unbelievable assertion. Presently she opened her pinched mouth just so much as was necessary and addressed her husband.

"'E don't come in 'ere. Yo may tek 'im to the fotherum, if yer like. That's your business; I'll hae noat to do wee't."

The tramp showed his right hand all blistered and bleeding.

"It's my 'alf-'oliday," he said. "Could I arst yer, ma'am, to 'elp your good gentleman to carry the pore bloke in?"

"I wain't touch 'im wi' my little finger," she said.

"It ud look bad at the inquess, ma'am, the hevidence what I should be compelled for to give. I 'ope they wouldn't make yer pay ruination damages to the widder an' them pore orphans, if it was brought in 'e died in default of your neglect. I 'ope so, but the feelin's o' juries allus goes wiv dead folk an' again live uns."

Of course the woman did not believe, but she felt

the inward push which compelled her to come off the step, and lend her stout arms to the labour of carrying the fainting man down the yard to the fodder-room. They laid him on a heap of hay.

"Now, ma'am," said the tramp, "if I was you I'd send 'im to Lossington for the doctor, sharp; not for fear of a pore chap's deaf, cert'nly not, but in consequence o' the consequences to yer own precious self."

"Gi' me yer advice when yo're axed for't," said the woman; "which'll be long first." However she turned to her husband. "Now then, hurry up, an' fetch Dr. Beardsley. Yo might a bin hafe way theer by this."

The man took a heavy step or two and stopped.

"Of coorse I moan't tek the hoss," he said.

"Moan't yer? Why not? Of coorse yer mun. The sooner them riff-raff's off our hands the better. Y'ud know that if yer knowed oat."

CHAPTER XXI

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS

THE fodder-room was a small cobble-paved square with a tiny window on the same side as the door. Under and about the window were a pile of cotton-cakes, bags of corn and meal and a corn-crusher, on the opposite side heaps of hay and straw separated by a chaff-cutter; between hay and window a ladder communicated with the loft by a trap-door in the boarded ceiling. The walls were hung with cobwebs, with a rusty scythe, with a lot of hay-forks on a rack, with a bunch of calf-muzzles a generation old and a set of cart harness.

Beiley lay on the hay in the corner farthest from the door, a couple of sacks under him and an old horse-rug over him. The doctor from Lossington, a young practitioner with eyes quietly alert under their spectacles, was dressing the tramp's hand and at the same time trying to extract from him a coherent account of the accident; which the latter out of mere brain-laziness was avoiding. The housewife's husband, Partly by name, farm-bailiff and tenant at will of the house and appurtenances, stood in the doorway and obscured the light with his considerable bulk.

"Well," the doctor was saying, "you got in, though I can't quite understand how; but how did you get out?"

"That chap pulled us out," answered the tramp with a half-turn of his face towards the bailiff.

"Both of you?"

"Why not, sir?"

"What do you say, Partly? Come, don't be ashamed of being a hero."

"I've gotten that yowe to dress," said Partly.

He turned from the door and went down the yard at a pace much brisker than his ordinary. Why the tramp should thus have diverted from himself the flow of admiration? Certainly out of no deep scheming; he was incapable of any but the readiest, easiest, most short-viewed; probably it was from a lazy abhorrence of fuss. Beiley said nothing, being fully occupied with his own sensations. Said the doctor as he gave the final twist to the bandage and pinned it down:

"You know, you'll have to go to the workhouse at St. Ogg's, both of you."

The tramp's head took the deprecatory droop.

"Couldn't walk, sir, my 'and's that awful bad."

"You'll be driven."

"Couldn't stan' it, sir; drivin' turns me sick. That's why I guv up keepin' my carriage."

The dressing had eased Beiley's pain, but he felt very weak and faint.

"Let me lie and die where I am," he said.

"You're not going to die," said the doctor; "and it's out of the question your lying here. You won't be allowed either medical attendance or relief unless you go into the house."

Hitherto Lord Beiley's telescopic opinion of the workhouse had been, that the labourer was lucky to have it as a mediator between him and starvation after he had done doing work and receiving wage; but that nearer view of it was so repulsively stimulating that it put strength into both voice and memory.

"I can pay for all I shall need," he said.

The doctor thereupon gave the face part of the attention which had hitherto been engrossed by the leg.

"In that case," he said, "perhaps you had better make arrangements with Mrs. Partly to occupy a room in her house, until you feel well enough to be moved. You must have a nurse for a week at any rate. Have you any friends you wish to communicate with?"

"No."

"You don't reside in the neighbourhood?"

"No."

"Simply passing through?"

"Yes."

"On business or pleasure?"

"On pleasure. But I should be obliged if you would kindly confine your questions to what is necessary for my cure."

The doctor recognized the peremptory under the courteous; he turned to the tramp.

"I needn't ask what you are."

"Put me down a traveller too, doctor," said the tramp; "pleasure and business combined."

"But gentlemen of your profession don't often come this way. What brought you here?"

"Luck and a donkey-cart."

"I wish him," said Beiley, "to have exactly the same treatment and accommodation as myself. I will be responsible."

The doctor gave directions for the treatment of their injuries, promised to call again next day and left.

"What's your name?" said Beiley to the tramp.

"What do yer want it for?"

"For a hook to hang something on."

"Jack."

"Jack what?"

"Jack nuffink. Us gentlemen trav'llers likes to travel as light as we can."

"My name's Jack, and I'm travelling light too. Shake hands, Jack."

"What for?"

"As a sign."

"Not goin' off yer chump wiv the pain, are yer?"

"No, the pain's much easier. How's your hand?"

"Don't 'urt 'ardly a scrap; only I can't forgit it."

"Neither can I my leg," said Beiley, and put forth his hand.

The tramp put forth his to meet it, apparently with much reluctance.

"'Owever it don't bind neiver on us to nuffink; it's my left," he said.

"It's my right," said the peer. "Now give me my jacket, Jack. There's something I want in one of the pockets."

"Anyfink partic'lar?"

"Yes."

"It's a mistake to put anyfink you're chice on in a pocket."

"Where should you put it?"

"In my belly. Pockets wears out, tears out, an'—flares out. Yer pocket an' yer jacket's both gone to kingdom-come, 'long wiv most o' yer stockin's an' 'alf the bloomin' bark off yer shins."

Beiley put a hand in either knickerbocker pocket and drew them out again, one with a shilling in it and the other with twopence ha'penny and a bunch of keys. He did not produce the half-crown in one of his waistcoat pockets, Lady Sally's gift, which apparently he did not regard as spending-money, though he could hardly promise himself pleasure from it as a keep-sake.

"That's the extent of my funds," he said.

"What more d'yer want?" said the tramp. "There's the makin's there of a fust-rate supper. To-morrer night's supper I'm 'sponsible for. That's yer own swagger word." The sombreness of Lord Beiley's expression was not lightened by the compliment to his phraseology. "Now I'm a-goin' down among the mugs to see what pickin's there is. Any horders for the town?"

"You might bring me some soap," said Beiley, and dropped his one and twopence ha'penny into the tramp's hand.

"A rummy chice that," said the tramp. "Soap don't look unlike cheese but it 'ain't a true 'ealthy eatin' smell. I never knowed but one chap as could make a meal on it, and that's for why they called 'im Soap-biler."

Just in the doorway he was struck with an idea, and turned.

"Yer didn't p'raps want it for washin' yerself?"

"That's just it."

The tramp looked at Lord Beiley with a mixture of amusement and wonder.

"What a howlin' toff you must be!" he said.

Then while the peer lay and divided his attention between his damaged leg and the strange cast of fortune which had thrown him thus upon his back, the tramp walked with a slow shuffle through the yard into the lane. The air was full of smoke wafted from the fiery field. About which there is no mystery. During the last autumnal burning of rubbish the peaty subsoil which underlies most of that tract, token of its marshy origin, had become fired, not the first accident of the kind in that country. The fire smouldered underground for many weeks neglected or unsuspected, and when at last it broke forth into more active ignition, it was so deeply and widely established that it was found impossible to subdue it. The drains on either side of the large enclosure prevented it from spreading into the adjacent land, but for what was already afire there was nothing but to let it burn itself out.

As the tramp passed, Partly and the grey-coated sheepdog were holding up a flock of sheep in a corner of the adjacent close. The bailiff looked over the hedge, and on his face there was the settled cloud of a grievance.

"Come now," said he, "why did yer say that about me?"

"What?"

"As I drawed yer out o't' fire. Yer know I'd noat to do wee't. Folks 'll think I'm wantin' or summat. They'll ayther say as I'm gooin' to the asylum or else I can't pay my way. Folk hereabouts don't do them harum-scarum things unless they're in downraight desp'rate sarcumstances."

"I done it to get out on't. You've got a dawg, hain't yer?"

"Yes."

"I hain't. Shovel it on to him; say as he done it. 'E can't conterdick, 'e can only bite; as 'll only make 'em think the wuss on 'im. Grand fing is a dawg. If I'd got one I might fink o' nussin' up a bit o' kerickter o' my own."

"I'd ought to a denied it fust-off, but yer spoke wi' such a damned braäzen face that I had to coom away just to convince mysen as I warn't guilty on't."

The tramp pursuing his leisurely way was soon overtaken by a cart and begged a lift.

"What's begotten yer hand?" said the carter.

"Burnt it on the Carr yonder."

"What were yer doin' theer?"

"Went for a warm: I'd slep' hout."

"Yo're the chap as Mester Partly saved out o't' fire?"

"I b'lieve yer."

"It had ought to ha' bin his missis; she's more savin' nor him even."

"What sort's your squire 'ere? Any good to the pore?"

"'E's nat a bad un, if yer 'appen to want a job of hard work."

"It's just what I was prayin' for yus'dy; but to-day work's hoff."

"That's unfort'nate."

Half an hour later the tramp walked into the village of Lossington. He appeared quite a different man from him who had so cheerily left the fodder-room. His head drooped, his shoulders were up and forwards, his legs tottered, his poor old boots dragged the ground; but all that was mere setting to the sling-hung arm that lay so piteously across his hollow breast. Thus, losing all fear of the magistracy and the vagrancy laws, he went with a starveling boldness through the squire's wide gates, past the kennel of the squire's dog, knocked at the squire's back door and asked for alms, in the name

of "me an' my pore pal what has had a haccident on the Carr."

The rumour of their misfortune had already gone through the house; the squire himself came out to him, big and blunt.

"Now, my man, what do you want?"

The further narrowing of the shoulders, the heightened prominence of the sling were the answer; the words mere ornament to the action.

"A trifle for to buy a crust o' bread for my pore pal, yer wushup, or for to bury 'im if—if——"

"You'll have to go to the workhouse."

"My pore pal's that bad, yer wushup, 'e can't abear to be moved. And I can't abear to leave 'im, yer wushup."

"Case of Damon and Pythias, eh?"

"The doctor's very words, yer wushup; but it's the burns what's the worst; 'is legs is gashly."

"He's lying at Skelter Farm?"

"Yes, yer wushup. The good lady an' gentleman has allowed us the corner of a hout-'ouse till the pore chap eiver gets better or gets wuss."

"It was Partly who pulled you out?"

"So 'e says, yer wushup; I'd quite laust my conscience."

"Which are you the most, bone-lazy or burnt?"

The tramp took his bandaged hand out of the sling.

"I don't want to see it; put it back. Here's five shillings for you. Don't let the police catch you breaking the law; for if they bring you before me I shall certainly have you locked up."

Ten minutes later the tramp had had a confidential talk with the policeman, had given him an adorned narration of his interview with the squire, had shown him the squire's crown, and under his very eye had entered Shimeld the grocer's shop and begged a screw of tea and a lump of soap "for the pore chap, if yer please, ma'am, what's got his deaf-blow on the Carr; not mentionin' myself as 'avin' only one 'and in hawful

hagony." Nay, the policeman walked by his side and continued the conversation as far as Batchelor's, where he begged the loan of a couple of old cups.

"Not for myself, lady; I'm nuffink but a bit of scum; so long's I gits summat to drink it don't matter wevver I drinks it out o' me 'at or me 'and; but the tother pore chap's seed better days, an' kep' his tripe shop in the Borough nex' door but one to a plate-glass winder."

So Jack the tramp and Jack the lord were already public characters. That the one had been seen begging for the other within arm's reach of the law was sufficient proof that they were upon no ordinary footing. It passed from mouth to mouth that they had a use for soap. Few of the doors that the tramp visited refused a contribution either in kind or money, and he returned to the fodder-room with a rich spoil in a borrowed basket. Which he had not had the labour of carrying; for a market-gardener who passed him on the road bade him get up behind on his dray, and went nearly half a mile out of his way to accommodate him.

Jack's beggings made a brave show on the rough deal box which he had borrowed from Partly for a table; the loaf of bread, the pat of butter, the pound of sugar, the couple of eggs, the slices of ham, the half-bar of soap, the bottle of beer, the box of pills, from somebody who believed that we can never be so ill as to be beyond the possibility of worsening, a decent black cloth jacket of the vicar's and a pair of old carpet slippers from Mrs. Biddicomb. Sam Biddicomb had lounged away out of life and left nothing behind but a consolable widow and a pair of easy-fitting down-at-heel slippers, big enough each for two ordinary feet of mortal man.

"There's not a many," said the tramp, "as ud make one an' tuppence ha'penny go so far. Is there now?"

"Things must be cheap here," said Beiley, passing them over with the most cursory of glances.

When the tramp tried coat and slippers on him he just asked:

"Where did you get them from?"

"Bought 'em; a hend-o'-the-season bargin."

Beiley did not show the disgust which might have been expected; he took but small interest just then in anything but his left leg, which tortured him. He said however to the tramp next day, "You must get what you want on credit; I will see that the bills are met." His "Tell me if you can't" was a mere afterthought to relieve him of further responsibility. Thereafter he simply lay on his back and suffered. He was in such a state that continuous thought, continuous anything but suffering was impossible to him; it would appear that the proper use even of his ears and eyes was taken from him.

Next day a stable boy brought a note from the squire to his bailiff Partly.

"Bravo, Partly! Let the poor vagabonds have milk and anything else in reason. It won't do for me to appear in it, but I'll make it right with you."

Whereupon Mrs. Partly, who had just been threatening the intruders with forcible ejectment, produced from her store in the eagerness of a greed that was tempered by a grudge a pair of threadbare blankets, an old horse-rug and a rough towel.

The doctor came again and wanted to know why they had not moved into better lodgings.

"We fink we should be more hinderpendenter-like wiv a house to ourselves," said the tramp.

"But I understood you would be able to pay for proper attendance," said the doctor.

"I hope," said Beiley, "you will accept my assurance that it is so."

The doctor, considering his patient's present discomfort and his companionship with a vagabond whose house-to-house cadging was notorious, smelt the rankness of a high-flavoured mystery; but being a busy man with many patients of known name and importance he let it pass. He was glad he had not committed himself to the engagement of a nurse.

The outhouse was fairly dry; the weather was summer-

like; door and window looked towards the afternoon sun. The injury to the tramp's right hand had been aggravated by his after exertions, but he bore it with an insensibility or contempt for pain which sometimes moved the lord to an ashamed admiration.

"Shouldn't a minded if it had bin boaf 'ands," he said, "so long's my mouf kep' in workin' order."

For Beiley's moods of impatience or melancholy he had the same amused contemptuous forbearance.

"What's hup wiv yer?" he said. "If yer fancy's again the old geyser's mutton brof, the doctor's not 'ere to see as yer don't nibble a bit o' this 'ere tasty 'am. Will yer have a pull at this bottle o' beer? Or a leetle sumfink stronger? What do yer want then? Give yer chice a name."

What name should he give to the complexity of his feelings? If the animal pain or the languor of exhaustion were for the moment more to the front, the shame and the remorse were the deeper seated.

"I want to get up and walk about," he said.

"An' if yer did? Y'ud only be walkin' away from yer supper. I can see the bloomin' use of a cove's trotters when it's walkin' to a meal, but away from one, oh crikey!"

But the tramp, notwithstanding his avowed dislike to any kind of exertion but the voluntary working of the jaws and the more or less automatic action of the gullet, performed what few chores were necessary in the fodder-room after a left-handed sluttish fashion. Their food was mostly given ready cooked, but he had borrowed an old oil-stove, begged a rusty kettle, found a leaky frying-pan in a heap of rubbish. With these utensils he was able to make a pot of tea and fry a rasher of bacon. He shook up Lord Beiley's bed of hay; he dressed his comrade's burns with little skill but some regularity, while quite neglecting his own. However at the doctor's next visit his tongue would have the ready lie for the doctor's question, and as his hand healed with wonderful rapidity the lie passed.

For the rest of the day he showed something like a genius for putting the smallest amount of exertion beyond the necessary one of mere lung-work into the largest wrappage of time. Two or three times a week there was the two-mile shuffle to the village, generally helped by a lift in cart or wagon; there was the cadging lounge from house to house, the talk, hasteless, desultory, unabridged, with anybody who cared to question or to listen, the restings at every invitation of sunny bank, convenient wall, fence or bench; and finally the visit to the inn and the slow consumption of a can or two "by the doctor's horders, for to keep up my little bit o' strenf."

But he was at his best in the evening. The day's toil, such as it was, had passed; there was none to engage his present but the not unpleasing play of clasp-knife upon bread and cheese or beef; none to disturb the immediate future but an inconsiderable journey from the box whereon he sat against the wall to his straw couch in the nearest corner. There was a bottle of beer within easiest reach; he ate, drank, talked to a listener and listened to a talker in the same leisurely methodless unconcerned manner, like a perfectly lazy and unmoraled man.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FODDER-ROOM

EVEN in that thinly peopled district the accident to Lord Beiley and the tramp made considerable ado. The weekly newspapers of the neighbourhood, the *Fordham Guardian,* the *Sopworth Inquirer,* even the *Newark Review* had contained effusive paragraphs headed "A Local Deed of Heroism," "A Plucky Rescue" or "Thrilling Escape from the Jaws of Death." Partly, whether from a sluggish vanity or pure sluggishness, had not followed the tramp's advice and laid the blame upon his dog. Raised to the position of parochial hero, he received the meed of an admiration which was only more than dubious when he was absent. Anyhow he was talked about; and may therefore be taken to have hit the very bull's-eye of ambition.

From farmstead and cottage the women came under pretext of something to beg, borrow or pay back, or with the open acknowledgment of a waste five minutes, and stood by the hour on the hither or thither side of Mrs. Partly's door-step, according to their degrees of intimacy. The men, their day's work ended, left their private second-early potatoes unlifted, their kidney-beans unpulled, with the sanguine prophecy that another day or two's sun would improve them. By ones and twos and threes they lounged awkwardly about in Partly's yard, kicked the cobble-stones with their nailed boots, cherished their horny hands deep in their sack-like pockets, smoked and chewed, sparingly ejected spittle and dropped comment. Or they looked in at the fodder-room and exchanged experience-weighted

opinions of pig and weather for the tramp's unlaboured lies. Him they called Jack Sit-down, while Lord Beiley went by the nick-name of Jack Lig-down, that is to say Lie-down.

Their talk was especially free one evening about a week after the accident. The sun's horizontal rays boldly entered the fodder-room both by door and window, casting on the wall exaggerated images of the tramp seated on his box and of his visitors standing about the doorway. Beiley lay in his nook between ladder and wall just out of shot of the blaze that came in by the window; but it made the brass flash on the cart-pad that hung upon a hook from the ceiling; it lighted up every stain, every cobweb on the wall above him, in loud contrast to the gloom of the side next the entrance. Partly, being vice-proprietor, stood within the door, but had the least to say of any; Sam Clagg the old hedger and Sid Jee the young under-gamekeeper stood by either jamb with the large person of Arthur Munn, labourer, between them. Over Munn's shoulder Joe Carter of the Turncroft Farm peered in, tall and thin; Jesse Bidden, rat-catcher, cattle-doctor, odd-man in general, was behind them all, a small spare dark-eyed eager man with close-curled hair and beard and wearing a sleeved waistcoat and cloth cap. Being small and hindermost he was cut off from sight of the room but spoke most of all. It was he who began it in a thin and squeaky voice, while the tramp lingered over his supper of cold boiled bacon and potatoes, and Tartar the sheep-dog, grey, rough-coated and bob-tailed, sat in the midst with the reserved inattention of a critic.

"Tell 'em what yer to'd me, Arthur," said Jesse.

"I dunno—What did I tell yer?"

"About—yo know—what Frank at the parson's said."

"What were that?" asked Sid.

Munn did not speak, so eager Jesse answered for him.

"'E said as t'parson hed writ oop to London to ax the Roil Human Society for a medal for Mester Partly."

"Yo've begun at the wrong end od beginnin', Jesse," said the slow Munn.

"What's the medal for?" said Sid.

"What's t' Human Society?" said Carter.

"But who to'd Frank?" said Clagg.

"Let the man speäk," said Carter; "'e can't answer for t' questions."

"Them as telled 'im," said Munn, sweeping the questions aside, slow but sure, "them as telled 'im telled 'im not to tell nubbudy."

"That ud be their Hannah," said Jesse; "she's a wunnerful woman for a secret."

"Frank ud tek that," said Sam Clagg, "to mean as 'e could tell ivrybody but 'is own wife."

"But what's the medal for?" said Sid.

"Them as telled 'im should know," said Munn, "for they took the letter to t' post an' stuck the stamp on theirsens."

"But yer hain't to'd uz what the oad medal's for," said Sid.

"For to encoorage 'im," squeaked Jesse, "to save other folkses' loives."

"I don't see no encooragement i' that," said Carter, "ayther for gettin' burnt or drownded, which is the next most awk'ardest death of all; I'd sooner hae a pipe o' bacca."

"Ah, but it een't loike them Jubilee medals," said Jesse; "unless I'm greatly mista'en it's more liker t' army medals as carries a pension wee'm."

"How d'yer mek that out?" said Carter.

"Well, it wouldn't be so much tho't on if it warn't backed up wi' summat solid."

"Was that all 'e to'd yer, Arthur?" asked Sid.

"No, 'e said as 'e hed it from a sure autherity."

"That's Hannah for sartain," squeaked Jesse; "she's a sure talker."

"But 'e said t' parson's letters warn't no business o' theirn as telled 'im, nor hisn——"

"As telled yo," said Clagg.

"Nor yit o' mine," said Munn.

"As were listenin'," said Clagg. "But what did e' saäy after all that pedigree?"

"'E said as we warn't to tell the hull parish, we war to use joodgment."

"Wer[1] own or hisn?" asked Sam Clagg.

"Nay, 'e didn't saäy."

"Then 'e meant wer own. For if he'd hed any 'twouldn't a bin loike Frank not to a made uz kindly welcome to 't."

The sun which had been blazing so boastfully up to the last, as though threatening refusal of his daily eclipse, seemed all at once to give way to compulsion and went behind the reek, which however it not only permeated with a glow variable from blood-crimson to the dunnest of purples, but at every opportunity pierced through and through with fiery flickering thrusts. Where they hit the wall or the men's hands and faces, these appeared to waver with the comings and goings of the weird inconstant light.

"It moot be welly-nigh seven o'clock toime," said Jesse.

But that led to no further conversation, so he squeaked again through the narrow gap between Munn's fat and Carter's lean, "What does it feel like, Jack Lig-down, to be saved from burnin' to deäd?"

"It feels as if it was hardly worth the trouble," said Lord Beiley wearily.

"'E appears," said Clagg, "to set as high a price on trouble as that chap as clammed hissen to deäd, becos bread were that cheäp it didn't pay for t' labour o' chewin' on 't."

"Hae yer iver tho't," said Jesse, "to tell Mester Partly as yo're grateful to him for 't?"

"No," said Lord Beiley.

"No? Coom, that don't seem 'ardly civil accordin' to my way o' thinkin'. What does the man say? Keep yer feet still, Sid Jee."

[1] Our.

"He don't say noat," answered Sid; "that's his opinion o' your way o' thinkin'."

Tartar had had enough of it; he rose and unceremoniously pushed his way out-of-doors between Munn's thick calves.

"What did yer do't for, Tom?" said Joe Carter after a sufficient pause.

"I dunno," answered Partly; "I've never tho't that much about it."

"Try an' think now, Mester Partly," said Jesse.

There was an interval of expectation; possibly Partly was trying, though it made no mark on his face. At any rate he said after a while:

"I'm a kind man."

"I niver heerd nubbudy gie yer that kericter afore," said Clagg; "not even yer own sen."

"A man might be kind," said Carter, "an' keep it to hissen."

"Were yer droonk?" said Sid.

"I hedn't hed aboon one hafe-pint."

"Then yer warn't even merry?"

"A man don't get merry on noat," said Partly almost impatiently.

"M'appen yer was mad, think yer?" said Clagg.

"Nay, nay, that don't run in our fam'ly. We'd a huncle as were a bit hodd, but 'e coom in by marriage."

"Then I don't see no excuse for yer. To risk the loife of a parish councillor for the saäke o' two or three cadgin' wastrels! This'll loase yer my vote, Mester Partly, at the next election."

"They're 'is feller-men any roäd," squeaked Jesse, who was tainted with radicalism.

"Feller-men be danged! Would yer sleep wee 'm, Mester Partly?"

Partly hesitated uneasily, as though bed and bedfellow were visibly offered to his yes or no; then drawn by the joint gaze of the whole company he answered:

"No, I wouldn't."

"Then I don't see no consistenty in bein' so thick wee 'm as to save their loives."

Joe Carter seemed uneasy under expressions so unusual. He said:

"There was a man at Brownley—I've seed 'im a many times—as saved a man out'n the cut. I niver heerd noat said again him. He was well anough liked; both afore an' after. Andrews; that were 'is naäme, John Andrews."

"What were the t'other man's naäme?" said Jesse.

"I niver heerd tell."

"No," said Sam, "an' if yo hed heerd tell yo wouldn't be no surer on't, no more nor yo hae gotten a eel becos yo hae't by the tail. Yo may depend yer life 'e wor one o' them here-today-theer-tomorrer chaps, with a naäme no more a fixtur nor 'is cooät. Respectable sorts o' men keeps watter for weshin' an' fire for warmin', mostly; any road they'd hae better manners nor to happen on a haccident among straängers."

All the time Jesse had been shifting and fidgeting, peeping and prying, while trying to get a glimpse in between the men who filled the door-stead. Perhaps his personal disappointment made him the readier to take a high moral ground.

"What call hae yo, Sam Clagg," he said, "to slur the men? They've niver done no harm by yo; they're civil spoken to yo. Why don't yer say summat, Jack Sit-down? Yo've a tongue i' yer 'eäd. Why don't yer oop an' black-guard 'im back?"

The sun, now at its lowest, shone under the smoke, again displaying its complete round, and flooded the fodder-room with its red triumph; and yet its very brilliancy made the shadows seem the larger and darker. Jack the tramp put the last double mouthful of bread and bacon into his mouth, put down his empty plate on the floor, wiped his fingers on his coat, sucked his unctuous teeth and then said quite at his ease:

"Beg pardon, gents, if I've kep yer waitin' on me. I know it ain't manners, but neiver would it a bin doin'

justice to them good victuals if I'd kep them a-waitin' whilst I talked. I've often bin short o' grub, never o' gab. What yer says, Mr. Clagg, I quite agrees wiv it, every word. Beautiful wevver for the crops, gentlemen."

Jesse, who was still manœuvring for a place of vantage, was now quite angry.

"Then yo hedn't ought to agree wee 't," he said. "We expeck men loike yo to be a bit mealier-mouthed nor ordinary, but we don't want yer to be downraight slawmy. Oat loike a man should hae summat loike a man's sperrit. He's nubbut a down-oad chap; damn at 'im a bit, man aloive! Yo've the raight on 't."

The tramp spat deliberately, once on his right and once on his left.

"Nay, Mr. Bidden, I couldn't rise myself up to be so owdacious; I ain't the sperrit what's expected of a sheep-doctor. I don't pertend to be nuffink. I never 'eerd nuffink but what I didn't quite agree wiv it."

"What are yer breffetin'[1] about so for, Jesse?" said Joe Carter impatiently.

"I can't see in," said Jesse.

"Yo mun do as I do, look ower Arthur's tother shou'der."

"It's not that," said Jesse, whose eyes were but on a level with Munn's elbow, "it's the funny loight as dazzes me."

Willy-nilly the sun touched the low line of hills along the horizon and straightway was shorn of half its glory. Then while a slow man like Munn might count his fingers its last contentious flashes flew high; it vanished.

"I don't see how a man can agree wi' iverything," said Munn, who was somewhat sluggish of understanding. "How can yer agree both wi' the valley Mester Johnson put on 'is colt, an' the valley Finlay the hoss-coper put on 't?"

"Heasy," said the tramp easily. "Some men likes their meat on one plate an' their puddin' on another;

[1] Fidgeting.

I'm a pore man, I eat 'em boaf togevver, bloomin' glad to get 'em any'ow. Same way some men says 'this un's a lie, that un's a trewf,' an' sorts 'em; they're that partic'lar. Eiver on 'em's good enough for the likes o' me. Down they goes, boaf on 'em togevver. Dunno but what they tastes all the better for the mixtur. We don't want all bread, nor yit quite all meat; but jolly glad to get eiver, us pore men."

"Come, do yer mean as yer can mek out a lig to be a trewth, Jack Sit-down?" said Jesse.

"Never tried, Mr. Bidden; it's good enough as it stan's; for me."

"What toime is it by your watch, Mester Carter?" said Jesse.

"Fower an' twenty past seven," said Carter.

Sid Jee relieved the door-jamb of the weight of his broad shoulders, the others, and Munn last, sluggishly bestirred themselves. Out of doors the day's vehement resistance had given way to a slow serene acceptance. One thought one saw the peeping of a star; saw it and did not see it. Within the fodder-room the brass of the cart-pad on the wall gleamed dully with a many times reflected light; the tramp's face, and perhaps his hands, appeared with a grey uncertain glimmer; Lord Beiley in the corner was parcel of the general shade. The visitors departed one by one, each with an unadorned "Good-night, all." The tramp shut the door and going to his own corner nestled down into the straw.

After a little while "Jack!" said Beiley from his corner. The vagrant's "Yus" was delayed until he was called again, as though sleep had already thickened his hearing.

"I ask you what that man asked the other man: What did you do it for?"

"Me? Nay, 'ow should I know? Do a thing an' reckon it up, that's two men's work."

"Think?"

"Not me; I'm no bloomin' sweater but a blown-out hidle vagabone. Let them think as 'as nuffink in their

insides. Besides for wunst in a while a chap may do anyfink for nuffink. If he does it twyst yer may s'pose 'e eiver cottons to it or is druv to it."

"I should like to know."

"I wasn't drunk. To prove it, I never am drunk; at least not to that golushous extent. Must a bin a sport, toff."

"But why did you give the credit of it to the other man?"

"Lord, what a hocean o' whys! There's nuffink I'd give away sooner nor what yer calls credit. Unless it was credit at the pub or the prog-shop. D'yer fink I wanted to be smuvvered with gab an' gas an' putty medals? Not me. I likes to go light. If some'dy guv me to-morrer's supper, the most scrumptious of toke, I'd sooner chuck it into the nex' ditch nor cart it about wiv me. Not but what, if there was a pension——"

"There may be," said Beiley.

"There ain't none as I see, let alone finger. All balm!"

As soon as he had done speaking his breathing slowed; he was fast asleep. Beiley remained awake to find what amusement he could out of ingenious blendings of his recollections and expectations. The only material thing visible to him was the narrow oblong of pale starless sky between the ridge of the house and the lintel of the little window. With the rest he could do no more than make inseparable distinction of dark from darkest; just so large a difference of colour as divided his apprehensions from his hopes. There was the squeak of rats within the room and overhead. Far away two dogs were howling, one against the other. After a great while one faint star appeared in that narrow field of sky, crossed it slantwise and disappeared. He looked for another, but none came. Twice in the night an owl shrieked as it flew past. When he turned over on his hay for the better ease of body or mind, the rats scampered to a distance and for a minute or two

their squeaking would be silenced. Long since the dogs had ceased their emulation. But turn as he might his thoughts never for one moment removed themselves or were still; until at length the lessened value of that patch of wan sky showed that day was at hand. With sudden stealth it came and the walls about him were again of solid brick, not of shadows and imaginations; the rats ran to their holes; he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII

MUTTON BROTH

It turned out to be true that the vicar of Lossington, never so happy as when he was getting up a subscription, a testimonial or anything involving much letter-writing and going to and fro with little to show for it, was busying himself to procure one of the Royal Humane Society's medals for Partly. It was much discussed in the parish, and opinion was general, at least among those who talked—and indeed those who do not talk are not supposed to have opinions—that the medal carried a pension with it, calculation however varying from a weekly something to an annual next to nothing. Partly exulted, perhaps to the extent of an extra pint of beer a week. Mrs. Partly professed to despise the medal, to disbelieve in the pension, not to have read the newspapers; but she bore the intrusion of "them two wasters" with a better grace than could have been expected, and did not tell the tramp more than six times a day that she hoped he and his butty would soon be "i' fettle to flit." The day-long "chuntering" to her husband, the daily complaints to butcher and baker, to visitor and chance passer, touching the muck and mess and fire-danger from their occupancy of the fodder-room may be taken merely as the relaxation of a busy life.

Who shall say how much Lord Beiley knew of what was going on? He lay on the begrudged fodder of the Partlys; he allowed the parson's gift-jacket to be drawn over his shoulders; what little he ate was out of the beggar's basket. But then he was used to seeing food

upon his table without hearing the chink of the money that paid for it and without thought of the labour of preparing it. The first acute disabling pain subsided into the languor of exhaustion; he felt so weak that his own hands were heavy to him. As theretofore it had been sufficient for him to lie and suffer, so then it was sufficient to lie and feel weak; for his mental troubles were but parcel of his general debility. They afflicted him, but with mere motion; even as a giddy mob of shadows cast by the fire vexes sick eye-sight with random combinations and divisions. And as small things near the source of light give greater shadows than larger ones at a distance, so what fretted him most during that period was neither his prime disaster nor his more serious inconveniences, but the unevenness of a blanket, the loudness of a voice, the rope-dancing of a spider between himself and the window, the gnawing of a rat in the night.

The first sign of a gain of strength, appetite and interest in his surroundings was the slight stirring of hunger which he felt at the smell of some mutton broth brought to his bedside by the tramp.

"Where did that come from?" he asked.

"From Mrs. Walker."

It was not true, but the tramp, having no bias either way, found it easier just then to invent than remember.

"Who is Mrs. Walker?"

Once started, the tramp sauntered indolently down the meandering unhedged path of falsehood.

"She's a hold sinner as 'opes to get to heaven becos she can't abide cold mutton."

"Do you mean she gave you it?"

"I hoffered 'er the money but she wouldn't take it. In 'opes of a front seat in 'eaven, yer know, reserved an' numbered. Besides she hadn't change."

Beiley put down the broth on the floor; he seemed to smell a taint in it.

"Aren't yer a-goin' to drink a drop of it, toff?"

"I'm not hungry."

"Yer don't heat enough to keep that there flea fat as yer grizzle so about."

Later in the day the clergyman came to see him, the tramp being also present. Either there was no great difference between the peer's appearance and the pauper's, or Mr. Dawson Dickson beheld them from too great a height to perceive it. A good-natured, well-meaning, gentlemanly man, he very kindly expressed his pity for their misfortune. But a superior person condescending to inferiority always thinks that the nearest way to a joint confidence is by a one-sided questioning. After the accident had been talked out, he asked them how they came to take up with that way of life. Beiley answered with a wry mouth:

"Probably just as other people take up with it; because I thought it impossible I ever could."

"The long an' short on it is, sir," said the tramp from behind, "it was the drink as done it; boaf on us."

"Always the same!" said the innocent gentleman. "The same old story! But why not try and break yourself of the accursed habit?"

"Just what we are a-doin', sir, gradual. We ain't 'ad nuffink stronger'n brof—'cept doctor's horders—ever since this unfort'nate misfortune 'appened us."

"Well, this misfortune, as you call it, may be a blessing in disguise, you know."

"Just what I called it, sir, the day afore yus'dy."

"It will be if it leads you to an effectual repentance, you know."

"It will that, sir, no fear."

Said Beiley testily, for he felt a recurrence of the pain, "I don't see anything in a burn to make a man repent of anything except of getting burnt."

"Then you refuse to repent?" said the gentleman, as though that were not the commonest of refusals; almost as common as promising to repent.

Beiley suffered more from the pain of the comfort than from the pain of the pain.

"How can I refuse," he exclaimed, "any more than

I can consent? If a man repents, it's because he must repent."

"Well, well, I don't want to probe you too near," said the good-natured clergyman, who like many another curator of souls took his aimless progging for probing. "Please understand I only do it for your good. But repentance without fruits meet for repentance, you know, is of no avail. I do hope when you're better you'll go back to the tripe shop. I'm glad the coat fits you so well."

"Why did he say that?" said Beiley as soon as their visitor had departed.

"'Ow should I know? Seed it hangin' in the shop winder p'raps an' had a heye on it for hisself, so said that jus' to show as 'e worn't jealous."

"It strikes me, Jack, you're an out-and-out liar."

"No, toff, only a quite moderate un. There's no sense in crammin' folk when it's convenientest to speak the trewf."

"What was the convenience in telling the clergyman just now that we were both given to drink?"

"When yer know what's expected on yer, what's the bloomin' good o' bovverin' yer brains to put togevver a slap-up hout-o'-the-hordinary lie? It ud be just chuckin' good material away."

"I don't think that an answer to my question."

"Ain't it, toff? Then so's it shouldn't be wasted p'raps yer'll kindly harst me a question as it does answer."

"Instead of that there's another question I should like to put, if I thought there was any chance that it would be quite inconvenient to you to tell an untruth."

"Yer can but try me, toff. I'd tell yer afore'and if I knowed myself."

"What did the clergyman mean by the tripe shop?"

"Oh, parson's slang for 'eaven. Not a bad name neiver for them as is fond o' tripe. An' them as isn't will be up there, if they're fit out wiv new stomachs

under their new 'earts; as they should be if them as does the job is in as big a way as what they says."

"Then you should be looking forward to translation."

"What's that? tripe?"

"Yes."

"Not a bit. There may be tripe to-morrer, but I never looks no forrader than supper-time. It's sausage to-night. Now the drorback, or one on 'em, to that 'eaven o' theirn is that the suppers, by what they make out, comes so bloomin' reg'lar; all planned—an' cooked for anyfink I know—from eternity. I ain't got two stomachs, let alone a milliond; I ain't got the bloomin' room for two suppers at once; even knowin' about another seems to squeedge the one what's down the cellar a'ready. No, my idear of perfick 'appiness is one belly an' one supper in it; tripe if yer like, 'ot, pig's fry with mashed taters, sausages an' ditter, 'ot, allus 'ot; a full-upper, a fair blowed-upper, so as yer can feel it crowd on yer all round, like a bladder full o' lard. After that good lush till you're silly-'appy. Throw a pipe or two in, an' if that isn't true 'appiness, sentence me to 'eaven for a lifer."

"I begin to feel hungry; probably through talking about tripe. What have you in your larder?"

"I could warm up that there drop o' mutton brof."

"No."

The refusal was decided.

"What d'yer say to a tiny bit o' this nyst tapioca puddin'?"

"How did you come by it?"

"Bought it, honour bright, at the cook-shop—Mr. Wilkinson's; turn to the left just arter the church. There's a chalk cow in the front winder an' a pump in the backyard, which is the signs they're in the dairy line. If you'd sooner 'ave it warm I could 'ot it up in half a mo'."

"Thank you, I'll have it as it is; unless warming it will drive off any lies that are sticking to it."

"I don't arst what yer means, toff, becos I don't know."

Which is the best, perhaps the only reason for not inquiring which has yet been invented. Lord Beiley's hunger was for the time being stronger than his scrupulosity; he ate the pudding, unvolatilized lies and all, down to the dish, and felt the better for it—or them. So much so that shortly afterwards he entered on a serious conversation with the tramp.

"I want to have a business talk with you, Jack."

"'Old on a minute, toff."

The tramp went to his straw heap in the corner, and extended himself on it so that his head had no superiority over his heels.

"I allus likes to take my business layin' down. I seems to see my way through it clearer if I keeps my 'ead level. Now go it, toff; if yer reelly can't 'elp."

"You don't appear to have had any difficulty so far in getting supplies on credit."

"Difficulty, toff? Yer talk like a hinfant. The only difficulty's been to persuade anybody to let me pay 'em on the nail. The grocer 'ere in partic'lar's a reg'lar bully to the chaps as won't let 'im chalk nuffink down. I b'lieve 'e'd a covered 'is 'ouse back an' front wiv chalk for me, an' then borrer'd the station 'oardin', if I hadn't spoke to the bobby."

"You must insist on it, Jack."

"I sometimes feels wery weak yet, toff."

"Do you feel strong enough to take the train to St. Ogg's and dispose of these?"

Beiley unclasped the studs from his shirt cuffs and threw them across to the tramp.

"Strike me if they don't look quite the fancy harticle! An' 'ow do yer want me to dispose on 'em? Put 'em up the spout, raffle 'em off at the pub, claim the reward for restorin' 'em to the bloke what lost 'em or hauction 'em hoff in lots to suit purchasers?"

"I leave that to your riper experience."

"They looks so natty again my wrist-rag I've 'alf

a score o' good minds for to buy 'em myself. 'Owever I'll give the hother swells a look-in, so consider me booked for St. Haugg's to-morrer."

Next day Jack went to St. Ogg's or elsewhere, and was away many hours, but Beiley waited a week before asking him how he had sped. The tramp then assured him that he still had five and sixpence ha'penny in hand from the pawning of the cuff-links. Beiley gave him his collar stud to dispose of in the same way. He had grave doubts of his comrade's trustworthiness but felt helpless, and had moreover been brought up to doing business by proxy and unsatisfactorily.

It may well be wondered why he did not at length communicate with Fasson and ease himself at least of the remediable part of his vexations. Arguments, if such they may be called, were for ever crossing the background of his pain, for and against, a ragged procession of inconsecutives and evasions, among which his real objections made no show. These were a repugnance to taking an unknown person into his secret, a still greater repugnance to displaying himself in his squalor to a known person. They underlay his lassitude, making his weakness the strongest part of him.

CHAPTER XXIV

RECOVERY

As Beiley's health improved, his perceptions quickened, his sufferings increased. But what he endured in his own person, beneath his own skin was only a part, tended more and more to become the smaller part of his torment. He was two persons as he lay there, suffered the pain of two existences, sustained at once the burden of the wrong-doing and the injury, of the man and of the woman, of him who hid and of her who showed herself. He had not been deceived by Lady Sally's outward bearing into thinking her callous to the insult, indifferent to the wrong. He felt within himself the compressed scorn and resentment proper to such a situation; stood upon her pedestal, bore the rent to her delicacy, passed by the public jibe, put aside the private condolence, comprehended the self-contempt that must be the portion of one who has allowed the opportunity to so scurvy a betrayal.

Ever and ever again there was a recurrence to his own loss. Not of name and position only; they could be appraised, could be deplored and be done with. But the loss of her! How could that be reckoned, itemed, put away? Her pale calm face was always before him, everything else mere background to it. How must she feel who could so completely conceal her feelings! What courage she had shown in circumstances where public opinion expected, demanded cowardice! Not even that final shock had altered by one line the natural nobility of her countenance, voice and demeanour; the shock of encountering him whom it would be flattering

to call the villain of her tragedy; as it would be lowering her to call him the cad of her comedy. What a mate for the man who should be worthy of her, the man, if such there were, of equal fineness, honour and fortitude! Therein was the sole bright spot in so sorry a complication; that she had escaped the long misery of so unworthy an alliance. Therein at least was some matter for rejoicing.

Yet he gave no sign of rejoicing, any more than when fronting the blacker aspects of the case. Which may mean this or may mean that, or may mean this and that; but at any rate means, it is a hopeless task to attempt unpicking the matted twists of a man's emotions and imaginations. Something may be said of his words and actions; they are, these the solid, those the fluid of his efficiency, have form and colour, measurable dimensions, assignable boundaries; but what he thinks, what feels, are the ethereal part of his activities; boundless, unfixable, unfollowable, they fill all space from here to the farthest and as much beyond the farthest. Let then only this ultimate fact be recorded; that as his pains lessened his sufferings increased.

Two or three weeks passed; the surface of the wound had sloughed, the healing was progressing, and still Beiley was tied to the fodder-room. Sometimes he would rise and sit awhile on the cadger's box, sometimes he would stand at the door and look out; but he soon drew back, for he felt the windows of the house were upon him; and whenever he heard a footstep on the stones outside he forthwith went back to his hay and turned his face to the wall. His head was weak, his limbs unstable, he felt an invalid's lassitude, but the lassitude of convalescence, for unawares his strength was returning on him. Of this however he was so little conscious that he believed his health to be upon the wane. He sometimes took a melancholy sick pleasure in imagining himself to be approaching his end; dying like a rat in a hole. Well, there was comfort in that. Overturn an inkpot and a page of villainous writing may be concealed

under one black blot; and so the whole sum of his errors, crimes and cowardices would be covered up by the pauper's pall.

These morbid broodings of his reached their culmination one sleepless night in the second week of September. He made his will mentally; he took his leave of life; he acted his dying so really that he almost wondered the rats did not begin to devour his corpse.

Many a time he died that night and came to life again. The night seemed as long as many lives. Many a time he wished for day; and when at last he opened his eyes it was day; day pallid and feeble, but still day. He could hear the young swallows twittering upon the eaves. He lay and the day strengthened, strengthened until it was stronger than his purpose to lie out yet another day. Before he knew that he had any intention of rising he had risen. With undirected steps he went to the door and with unbidden hand opened it. The rush of the cool fresh morning breeze into the mixed atmosphere of the hovel, stuffy, mouldy, ratty, stablish, was delicious. It smote his forehead with a rebuke, but the rebuke of love. He stepped out of doors; he took full breaths of the uncontaminated air. It quenched the fever of his brain, it fixed his wavering sight, it braced his feeble knees, it nerved his weak will. He walked down the stones to the gate and out into the field. He had an expectant feeling, as though he had made discoveries and were on the eve of more.

The sun was but half-an-hour's journey above the plain. The moon was flying before him; so near that she was pale with the fear of being caught; and as he pursued he shot his arrows after her. He permeated the mists under him with a white glory that hid the horizon. A field of ripe barley stood between the looker and the luminary. The white gleam and the white corn were at one; each awn of those myriads of heads was crowned with a silvery flicker and their joint radiance flashed like a Lilliputian army at drawn swords. Beiley looked away. The western horizon contemplated with

a grey pensiveness the glowing magnificence of the east. Overhead the sky was clear save for a few white woolly wisps of cloud; athwart the bluest of it stretched a train of cawing rooks. But he soon turned again sunward. An invisible lark sang out of the upper splendour like an inspired chant, pure voice, from the impenetrable effulgence of a shrine.

He heard the house door open, heard a man's hob-nailed boots upon the stones outside, heard Partly whistle to the dog. He felt a momentary hesitation between going in and going forth, forth never to return. It was the latter that attracted him, but habit enslaves even our desires; he went back to the hovel. The tramp was still asleep and snoring like a pig. At one end only his face, at the other a boot appeared out of the up-heaped straw; an unwashed, unshaven, unattractive face; a dusty frowzy boot, worn down on one side and showing the uncleanly flesh through two great slits in its upper. He lay down and did not go out again that day. That he was not however musing entirely at random was proved by his words to the doctor, who called about noon after an interval of two or three days.

"I should like to know, doctor, how much I owe you for your attendance."

The doctor looked away from the leg and at his patient's face.

"Suppose I say a guinea?"

"That's very little."

"Oh, if you claim to be a cut above the ordinary labourer, a joiner or bricklayer, say, I couldn't charge you less than twice as much."

"That still seems very little."

"Oh, but if you were as well off as the publican, or like the parson would be offended if you weren't charged as though you were well off, I should make it from three to four guineas, according to the actual state of my conscience."

"And the squire?"

"You're carrying your curiosity a little too high, Mr. Jack. How much I should charge such a gentle-

man as Mr. Lyddeker, supposing he did me the honour of being ill in my hands, would require a great deal more consideration than the prescriptions; would require besides pen, ink and paper, with a little preparatory practice in the multiplication table. What is your next question?"

"Nay, doctor, I've done with impertinences, I have only to thank you for your care and kindness. I do so most heartily."

"What is all this preliminary to?"

"To my recovery."

"But I haven't yet authorized you to consider yourself recovered."

"I can compel myself to go, and I won't stop a day longer."

"Oh, oh! now you talk like an autocrat, there's nothing for me to do but to give a little extra attention to your bandages and to advise you for a week at least to walk as little as possible. Does this gentleman go with you?"

"If he will."

"Put me down for number two, sir," said the tramp. "I'm gettin' jolly well sick o' seein' the same walls an' furniture every mornin' when I wake."

The doctor looked from the peer to the tramp, from the tramp to the peer.

"I can't make you out," he said. "You're evidently a gentleman, yet——" His glance went again to the tramp and returned. "You talk as though you had command of money, and you live upon the cadging of——" Again the turn and return of his eyes completed his meaning.

That slight further blanching of a pale face did not fully express the shock which Beiley felt. It was but the rending away of a doubt it is true, but when a doubt is the only cover one has against a despair, its loss is as the loss of a certainty, a necessity.

"I can't make you out," said the doctor again.

"Thank you for that too," said Beiley.

The doctor, being young and quick to take a hint,

said no more; which self-restraint was perhaps the reason why he was called back after he had taken his leave.

"I may find," said his patient, "that I'm in debt to the people here in such a way that I can't very well make any personal return for it. May I trouble you once more? Could you suggest something of public utility which I might offer in discharge of the liability?"

The doctor answered without hesitation:

"What one sees depends, you know, on where one stands. The parson probably, if you had consulted him, would have mentioned the church organ's desperate need of repairs. The schoolmaster's special mania is for a scholarship at Sheffield University. A plebiscite would probably vote an addition to the usual redundancy of the Christmas fare. I following my private bias suggest that a subscription towards the establishment of a public nurse here wouldn't be wasted money."

"Thank you."

The doctor departed. Beiley gave the tramp neither word nor look. Nevertheless the tramp presently arose and shuffled across to him from his own corner, not with the mien of a shamefaced person caught in a deception but of a lazy one forced into action. He had the stud and sleeve-links in his hand and dropped them on Lord Beiley's knee.

"'Ere, toff; I been on the square. I'm glad to git shut on 'em. Them there little bits o' things has laid on where I puts my supper like a load o' bricks. If I was sentenced to choose between keepin' a jeweller's shop an' a cauffin shop, I'd say, 'Thank yer, my lord, the cauffins for me.'"

"Why didn't you do as I told you with them?"

"Because the tother was the heasiest; an' that's all about it."

"Why did you tell me you had?"

"'S truth, toff, I reckoned it was your horder, you bein' so bad; so I measured yer ear an' guv yer the hanswer what fitted it."

CHAPTER XXV

THE ADMIRAL AND OTHERS

THE tramp made it his business during the rest of the day to let it be widely known that he and his mate were at last upon the move.

"Thank yer, ma'am, it goes agin me to refuse the good victuals, which very like we shall be bad in want of 'em by this time to-morrer; but two pore cripples like me an' my pal ull find it enough to do a thirty miler wivout anyfink to carry but ourselves an' our sufferin's. Gord bless yer, ma'am. It's been like a little 'eaven below 'ere among all your kind Christian 'earts. I 'ope we shall meet again upon a better shore."

And so he got twopence instead of the mess of pudding and potatoes that had been offered him.

During the day the wind backed to the west and brought with it so much fume and ash from the fire, that the vagrants had to keep the fodder-room door closed as a defence against it. Beiley sat alone in the early evening on the bag of maize under the window. He could hear the competitive voices of three women from the house, one within-doors, two without. He sat and tried to piece together their broken verbiage into a meaning; it was at any rate more amusing than the consecutive wrangling of his own thoughts. The door opened and let in, besides a waft of smoke, Partly and the stalwart form of Topley the butcher-publican of Brownley. The latter was uttering his final words about a fat calf he had been looking at.

"I'll come again in a fortnit. It'll be all that afore

I want him or he wants me." He nodded towards Lord Beiley. "Good-evenin'. A baddish accident that o' yourn. How do yer find yerself to-day?"

"Much better, thank you," said Beiley.

The tradesman, who had apparently been merely for looking into the room and withdrawing, directed his eyes more curiously towards the window.

"Ever been to Hull?" he said.

"Once," answered Beiley.

"What d'yer think to't as a place o' business?"

"It seems a busy place."

"Speakin' as a man with a bit o' business o' yer own to settle?"

"Yes."

The atmosphere of the room was clouded with smoke and traversed by shadows. The butcher-publican struck a match and lighted his pipe, his eyes all the while upon the sitter under the window. As he dropped the glowing match-end and put his foot on it he said:

"I reckon five shillings is enough to charge any man for supper, bed an' breakfast. Don't you, Tom?"

"Heaps," said Partly.

"Loads," said one of two men who had just come up to the door.

"Hoceans," said the other.

The first-named was Coppin, a bricklayer of Lossington, who was doing some repairs to Joe Carter's roof and had looked in on his way home; a stumpy man with a big red face and a bald head. The second was his paddy or labourer, a gaunt unkempt tatterdemalion with eyes which were either fixed in a general stare or else wandered without control. He always went by the name of the Admiral and was supposed to be "hafe-baked" or half-witted, but he had a sort of spluttering promptitude of tongue though he sometimes made mistakes about his work; never such mistakes however as tended to the increase of his own labour.

"Can yer change me half a quid, Tom?" said Topley. "A man as owes me a dollar sent me horders for two

sovereigns, and I want to leave the balance as I go past."

Partly went into the house for the change.

"I want your opinion, Coppin, o' the cauf i' th' next hovel."

"But I'm no judge at all o' cauves, Mester Topley; my opinion's worth noat."

"If it's worth noat yer needn't hang back so from giving it away. I want yourn too, Admiral."

"Ah, but my opinion is worth summat, Mester Topley; it's worth a pint o' beer the next time I goo to Brownley on business."

"Yer shall have it, Admiral."

"I'm gooin' to Brownley on business to-morrer."

"I'll see to it. Off with yer."

The Admiral ready, Coppin reluctant, the two men went round the corner. Topley turned to Lord Beiley.

"I suspicioned summat the moment yer spoke, my lord. When I got 'ome again that day, which was late on account o' business, there was a strange gentleman waiting to pump me about yer. I reckoned 'im up and told 'im you'd gone to Nesthorpe. The lie made itself; the bill about it was on the table afore him. 'But I understand,' says 'e, 'as he'd no money.' Having got the first lie so cheap I thought I could afford one o' my own. 'He popped his watch,' says I, 'for to raise the funds.' 'Sure 'e's gone?' says 'e. 'Seed 'im on the way,' says I; and to save more lying, 'I've got a ship to kill afore dark, sir,' says I and goes out. There were no train to Nesthorpe that time o' day so the gentleman stayed the night with uz, but he got no more out on me than that. Sorry I can't ask yer to my house. My missis, yer see, 's a woman with eyes that are only second-best to her tongue, and she's on the look-out night and day for the man as slept in number one the latter end of last June."

"I trust to your discretion, Mr. Topley."

"Your lordship may trust as my discretion ain't my wife's an' all, if that's what yer mean."

The calf-valuers were returning; Beiley dropped his voice yet lower.

"I found I was indebted to you for more than the drive. You must allow me to repay you at any rate the money value of your kindness."

The Admiral was already at the door, opinion and all.

"My opinion, Mester Topley," he said spluttering, "is as I'd sooner hae a joint on 'im smokin' on a dish nor the hull three quarters on 'im eatin' in a stall."

"Three quarters? A cauf has fower quarters, Admiral."

"Ay, but that tother quarter's stuffin'. I heerd a woman say so the day afore yisterday, i' my own hearin'. What's your opinion, gaffer?"

"My opinion," said Coppin heavily, "is the same as 'twere afore, that a cauf's nayther brick nor mortar."

Partly returned with the change in company with Joe Carter.

Said Topley, "The last time I were the tother side o' St. Ogg's I gev a man a lift i' my cart, ten mile or so. How much ought I to charge him?"

"A stranger?" said Carter.

"Ay."

"Two shillin'," said Carter.

"Yo couldn't say less," said Partly.

"Nor couldn't say more," said Coppin.

"An' a pint o' beer," said the Admiral.

"But I fell fast asleep and druv 'im another ten mile furder than I wanted to go."

"I don't see as yo could charge him for that," said Carter.

"No," said Partly.

"Not likely," said Coppin.

"Nay," said the Admiral, "but if the man had gied yer the pint at th' end o' the fust ten mile, as he'd the raight to do, yo'd a wakkened up, Mester Topley. Yo moot mek 'im pay double, double money and double beer an' all."

"There's a bit o' nounce[1] i' what yer say, Admiral," said Carter.

"Nay, Mester Carter," replied the Admiral, "I've niver been in no company yit but what there's been a bit o' nounce theer."

With his back to the others Topley did something with a match-box. The gathering about the door had been increased by the entrance of Clagg, Munn and Tartar the dog.

"Do yer smoke?" said Topley to Lord Beiley.

"Yes."

"Then p'raps you'll accept of this box of matches."

It felt heavy for a box of matches, but Beiley without thought put it away in his pocket.

"He moot feel," said Clagg, "welly like the man as were fond o' beef an' got a Christmas gift o' mustard."

"Ay," said the Admiral, "he should a said he were main fond o' matches, then he'd a gotten the bacca."

"It's not iv'rybody as has your gumption, Admiral," said Topley.

"Yo've fun' that out at last, Mester Topley," said the Admiral.

"Nay, I fun' it out a while aback, but I couldn't make up my mind to acknowledge it. Well, I must be moving. Good-night, all."

As the butcher-publican went out the tramp entered; he had passed Jesse Bidden and Sid Jee in the yard. All now came into the room, and the door was shut just as Tartar was about to withdraw. He made no fuss; he went into the tramp's corner, lay down on his straw, bit at a flea and immediately fell asleep. Beiley went back to his own lair and turned his face to the wall. There was an appearance of smoky light about the narrow window, but by the door, where the visitors stood with their indolent backs to wood or wall, there was hardly glimmer enough to divide the general shade into shadows. The tramp sat on his box and ate the supper he had brought with him. He had dropped the

[1] Sense.

cant of the morning, as he always did at supper time; even as the tradesman at the due hour puts up his shutters and lapses into the private citizen.

"Which road was yer thinkin' o' tekkin', Jack?" asked Jesse.

"Dunno. May know to-morrer, when we're started."

There was a pause of surprised pondering before Munn said slowly, thinking it out as he spoke:

"Dunno? That's a caution! An' to-morrer's so nigh! Ommost to-day as yer might say. By gash, if I felt mysen hing so loose on to the worruld as that cooms to I should be afeared o' fallin' off."

"So should I, Mr. Munn, if I fell as 'eavy as you."

"I wonner," said the Admiral, "as yo bain't scarred to deäd o' sleepin' i' strange beds, wi' strange happins an' strange fleas."

"Oh, fleas is wonderful friendly beggars; they never makes theirselves strange wiv yer; an' that's 'ow 'tis yer feels at 'ome hanywhere."

"Is that so?" said Clagg. "Then fleas teks a sight less gettin' used to nor women does. After all, Jack, Coppin's a pluckier man nor yo, for he's venterin' it wi'd widder."

"D'y' 'ear, Coppin?" said Sid.

"Ay," said Coppin without sign of emotion.

"How did yer coom to ax 'er?" said Jesse.

"I can't joost say."

"Did she fair corner yer an' fo'ce yer to't?" said Sid.

"No, I can't say as she did."

"Yo know whether it wor to please yersen or sum'dy else surelye?" said Clagg.

"Nayther; it joost 'appened."

"Then I withcall my opinion," said Clagg. "It ain't coorage, it's joost want o' sense."

Coppin seemed struck by that, though not stirred.

"Nay, nay," he said, "I don't pretend to say what 'tis, but it ain't want o' sense. It couldn't be. A man couldn't be wantin' i' sense wi'out knowin' on't; he'd hae sense enoo for that."

"It appears to me as y'ore i'd raight, 'Arry," said Partly.

"Nubbudy niver 'eerd me set mysen up for to be a witty man," continued Coppin thus encouraged, "but I've allus hed sense enoo for oat I've iver wanted to do. An' what ud be the sense o' wantin' more nor yer want?"

"A bellyful," said Jack, "'s as good as a belly-ache. If not better."

That called attention back to the tramp and his mate.

"We know," said Jesse, "as Jack Lig-down is or was i' th' tripe trade, but yo've never telled uz, Jack Sit-down, what trade yo're in yersen."

"I bin a many many trades in my day."

"Tell uz one."

"I bin a fitter."

"What sort o' trade's that'n?"

"A fitter does fittin'. It fitted me well till I got to a hiron an' brass country."

"Why did yer drop it then?" asked Jesse; "What was yer next?" asked Sid; both together; and Jack answered the nearer.

"A carpet-weaver."

"Is that good pay?" asked Jesse.

"When yer can light on a job."

"Yo niver let on one, I reckon?" said Clagg.

"Never."

Said Munn in his slow obese way, "I can't unnerstan' a man changin' 'is trade wi' that freedom. I should think it moot feel ommost as bad as to be allus a-changin' yer skin."

"Oh, it's nuffin when you're used to it. I dare say changin' yer skin wouldn't be; nor yer bones neiver."

"I once knowed a man," said Carter, "as changed his ockipation a deal. Fust 'e wor a baker, an' then 'e wor one o' them insurance chaps, an' then 'e wor a butcher. But 'e never made noat out; his meat warn't never prime, an' 'is bread warn't nubbut middlin', an'

I don't think nubudy'd ower much faith in his insurance."

"Rat-ketchin' an' cattle-doctorin'," said Jesse, "ain't different professions; they're nubbut branches o' t' same profession."

"They're as much t' same, Jesse," said Clagg, "as man an' wife, eatin' an' drinkin', roguery an' prosperity, work an' t'work'us."

"If a man hain't the 'bility," said Carter, "for to mek a livin' at one trade, it stan's to reason as 'e hain't the 'bility for to mek a livin' at two 'r three."

"I b'lieve yer," said the tramp. "But yer overlook this, Mr. Carter; a man may make a livin' out o' failin' to make a livin'; an' the more trades 'e 's the 'bility to fail at the better that livin' 'll be."

"There may be a little bit o' summat i' that," said Munn slowly, as he chewed the meaning of it. "Yo're a more cleverer man, Jack, nor yo've any 'pearance o' bein'."

"Nay," said Jack, "I've a many lines but that ain't one of 'em; nobody's never took me for a clever man."

"What do they tek yer for, mostly?" said Jesse.

"For a rogue an' a vagabone."

Said Clagg: "Do they gie yer both o' them fine names for yersen or nubbut the pick on 'em?"

"Both."

"Then yo're better off nor t' Admiral; for when t' squire called 'im ayther fool or knave tother day, 'e meant 'im to tek one an' leave the tother."

"Which on 'em did yer tek, Admiral?" asked Sid.

"Nayther," answered the Admiral; "I've names enoo o' my own; better uns an' all. I left 'em, one for t' squire, the tother for Clagg. An' fine an' bug o' t' change they was, I warrant."

There was a general laugh.

"Well done, Admiral!" said Jesse.

"Had yer theer, Clagg," said Sid.

"I did look at 'em, Admiral," said Clagg, "joost

turn 'em ower wee a finger, but I seed they were such a grand fit for yersen I wouldn't rob yer."

"T' squire seems loike to ha' gotten the two on 'em," said the Admiral. "Well, he has the most raight to 'em when all's said an' done; an' m'appen the most need on 'em."

"Yo're comin' out, Admiral," said Sid.

"I were born theer," said the Admiral.

A spring-cart drove by.

"Mester Bradley coomin' from t' station," said Jesse.

"It'll be nigh on eight o'clock toime," said Sid.

Somebody opened the door; Tartar had passed out before the entrance of the cool air qualified with peaty smoke could be felt. Such dim light as was admitted did not disturb the shadows. The gathering began to break up.

CHAPTER XXVI

GOLDEN BALLS

BEILEY awoke hungry at daybreak; he had not eaten anything since the doctor's visit. The match-box put into his hand by Topley contained two pounds less nine and eightpence. He gave the tramp half-a-crown of it and sent him to the house to purchase milk, eggs, bread and butter, of which he made a good breakfast. He would then have started at once, but the tramp was so clever at inventing delay that it was nine o'clock before they left the fodder-room. The tramp wore a pair of stout boots in place of his worn-out shoes and a brown billycock instead of the motor cap. The black sling still hung from his neck, empty for the nonce.

"I can put eiver of my 'ands up in turn," he said; "and besides bein' a good fetch it'll rest 'em. I wish I could put my 'ole bloomin' body in at wunst."

But if Jack the tramp might have been congratulated on a slight improvement in his appearance, Jack the lord looked decidedly worse. There was a three weeks' beard upon his chin, something perhaps for a disguise but not enough for a decoration. He retained the vicar's black jacket and his legs were clad in shabby trousers of a flashy check, once the landlord's of the Jolly Bargee. By turning them up he prevented their too great length from incommoding his heels. He still had Bertha's bead ring upon his little finger.

Mrs. Partly, summoned to the door by his knock, looked but sourly out upon the grey morning. His courtesy of word and hat seemed to squeeze from her, wring from her a sour brief return, a nod and a grunt,

as it were the lees of kindliness; and she was turning from the door.

"Stay, if you please. I want to know what return I can make you for the trouble we've given you."

There was a grim glint of satisfaction in the woman's eyes, but her lips did not relax their tightness except just to let the words pass.

"What the danger o' fire and what the muck wi' all that mortaring in an' out, I wouldn't ha' done it not for ten shillings a week."

"Yer wouldn't, missis; quite right;" said the tramp, "for yer wouldn't get nobody to pay such a semi-attached-villa price for yer old rat-'ole."

"Yer was quite free to leave it any time," said the woman. "If yer didn't, 'twasn't becos yer was locked in."

"Please to say how much," said Lord Beiley.

"Then there was the blankets, as won't be any use to me again, an' them hoss-rugs, and there's a hole in the bottom o' the little bucket."

"I did that, missis," said the tramp, "lookin' at it passin' tother mornin'."

Beiley took out Topley's match-box and emptied its remaining contents into her outstretched hand.

"It's all I have with me," said he; "if that doesn't satisfy you, you must say what further I'm in your debt."

The woman's "I moot be content" had surprise and satisfaction if not graciousness in it.

"Does that pay, missis," said the tramp, "for the rats an' smoke, or are we still owin' yer for them?"

Mrs. Partly's mind was rudely recalled from its half-content.

"Yo're used to getting accommodation for noat. Why didn't yer go to the work'us? It's the only place for sich uns as yo."

"We stopped 'ere on account o' yer own lovely mug an' the smell o' the muck-yard. The two togevver was too much for us; they drored like a double-strenf diaclum plaster."

"The droring was all of our side then; we wasn't took wi' yo ayther for yer looks or yer smell."

But even during the fine irony of his last words the tramp was turning the corner of the house. He was cunning; the housewife's sufficient rejoinder was mere waste breath, for Lord Beiley took no share in it, as his civil good-day attested.

It was a dull chilly morning with the fickle weather-cock pointing from the north-east.

"Well, toff," said the tramp, "which road are we to put our snouts for?"

Beiley had thought it all out. From what was best he was still kept off by fear, by shame, by a resolute irresolution. Reckoning each weakness as a reason he had gone through a form of proving his folly to be rational. That slight hesitation before his answer was the measure of the time occupied in making a quick return to an older expedient; which was rendered necessary by the new emptiness of his pockets.

"To Hull. How long will it take us to get there?"

"Depends 'ow much sweat we puts into it. I've took 'alf a year to travel no furder, an' I've done it in less 'n a week."

"A week? But by the nearest route going as fast as we can?"

"I've no experience o' sich, an' to 'ear talk of it omost takes my bref. Workin'-men on the look-out for a job has to be partic'lar careful not to take the hedge off their appetite for work."

"Is there any considerable town hereabouts within easy reach?"

"Lessee. What makes a town considerable? 'Orse racin'? If so, why not Dauncaster? Or tauffey? If so, Dauncaster agin. Bein' the St. Leger day it couldn't a fell convenienter."

"And how far is it to Doncaster?"

"P'raps a dozen miles; p'raps a baker's dozen. I've never been partic'lar to a mile or two, any more'n to a day or two."

"Twelve miles? Say three hours." The tramp shrugged his shoulders. "Or allowing for my game leg——"

"Don't forgit my game 'and, toff."

"Four hours."

"What's the bloomin' 'urry?"

"I think we could raise the means there to finish the journey to Hull by train."

"Don't, toff! I look on tin spent on train fares as so much good eatin' and' drinkin' chucked on the fire back. Yer may bet all you're worth as I never travel in them snorters 'cept at the expense of Goverment. It's quicker, y'ull say? But what is the bloomin' gain o' gettin' anywhere quick? Just this: that you're in time to get quick to somewhere else."

"Anyhow we must walk it to Doncaster."

The tramp led the way by a roundabout field track, which at first skirted the burning field, but so that only the smell of it reached their nostrils. The gross reek, unable to rise in the dank air, lay upon it in a long unbroken trail but little elevated above the plain. It was near the end of harvest. The rich tints of the upstanding corn or of the stowks, ranked like an army under canvas, were but here and there apparent amid the paler gold of the stubble. The living green of the broad turnip enclosures was in strong contrast with the sombre colouring of decadent tree and hedge. As if inspired by his surroundings the tramp began to talk seriously to his comrade.

"Toff, I can see I shall 'ave trouble wiv yer."

"I hope not, Jack."

"'Ope? What's the bloomin' use of 'ope when the fat's fizzlin' in the fire?"

"Wait till we get to Doncaster, Jack, and I'll make it up to you."

"Yer mean p'raps y'ave a little money on an event as is a dead cert? Toff, b'lieve me on my solemn sarmon, if I'd drored 'alf cash an' 'alf gas for all the promises I've 'ad give me founded on 'orse-racin' luck,

I shouldn't be 'ere now a-talkin' to you; I should be sittin' in my own parlour, an' all the nobs of the county round me stuffin' theirselves into a hagony of pleasure at my expense."

"Well, Jack, I'll make a bargain with you."

"No, yer won't, toff. I'll tell yer for why; I never 'ad a bargin hoffered me yet but what it was a reg'lar red-'ot drop-me-quickly sell."

"Well, if you object to that word—an agreement with you."

"I'm agreeable, toff; chalk me down number two; if it's you what's goin' to agree wiv me. If you'll find all the give I'll find all the take. I can't say no fairer."

"It's this: if you'll give yourself a holiday from business until we reach Doncaster I promise to make the loss up to your own satisfaction."

"Sounds nobby, toff; but I reckon that promise o' yourn is a-top of a hif."

"I can't deny it."

"I knowed it. I never yet seed a promise on the level what I couldn't look over wivout stretchin' myself. 'Owever—say it's the summer vacancies—it's a pore 'eart what never rejices. Though the beauty o' my perfession is this: that yer don't never need no bloomin' 'olidays, y'ave sich a pleasure and a pride in yer industry. It ud be all 'oliday, if only the sun ud stop out an' the coppers keep in. Ah well, there's drorbacks to ev'ryfink; continial mashed taters an' sausages makes yer long for suffin less tasty for a change. Ever kep a little shop, toff?"

"No."

"There must be pleasure in that—I've sometimes fancied it for myself, if 'twasn't for bein' tied to the same door-step an' reg'lar hours—sellin' margarine for butter, sand for sugar, gooseberry leaves for tea an' turnips for jam; doin' the women out of hounces of bread an' swearin' like a copper as a soft-roed un is hard. But lor love yer, that's nuffin to our trade. Our sugar's all sand; and inferior sand at that. I've copped

myself laughin' in my sleep at it. Rum beggar sleep is, ain't it? The flats swops us their brass for a mouthful o' measly gab; and all the thanks they gets is, we thinks 'em jolly mugs for so doin'."

By track and lane with many a rectangular turn they traversed that drain-parcelled level, crossed the slow river which receives its waters, and so entered Torby. The tramp kept his promise with reservations; for once Lord Beiley, being a little ahead during their passage through that village, happened to look back and saw money pass between a woman and his companion.

"You're not keeping your word, Jack," he said, as soon as they were past the town and within talking distance again.

"Thought yer wasn't lookin', toff. 'Owever the donny didn't give me nuffin, so I only amused myself a bit an' no 'arm done."

"You're an awful liar, Jack."

"Nay, toff, only when it's convenient. I don't call that bein' a liar; I call them liars like Swelp-me Richards as goes out o' their way to mysticate yer, an' tires their tongues out wiv tellin' corkers. But yer done it yerself, toff, when yer made me give yer that bloomin' promise. I've got a reg'lar hitch now to try it on the most unlikely coves, out-an-out skinflint snouts. I feel jus' like a cove I once knowed, a flue-faker,[1] an' a lusher if ever there was one. 'E us'ter sign the pledge every time afore 'e broke out on the booze, so as 'e might enjy it for all it was worth. 'Eaven, toff, if there ever is sich a place——"

"I can't say."

"It'll be a country where there's laws agin everyfink from breathin' to bigamy, and the game'll be to break 'em wivout bein' copped."

"And if you are copped?"

"Then you're out till yer cop sum'dy else."

After which a period of silence and recuperation, while they travelled along a deserted lane. But whether

[1] Sweep.

his tongue marched, marked time or stood at ease, the only change the tramp allowed his legs was from mere loafing to pure stoppage. Beiley, impatient to be at Doncaster, sometimes argued against his comrade's dilatoriness, sometimes insulted it, now walked ahead and now abreast of him; but could neither compel nor shame nor persuade him to increase his pace beyond an average of a mile and a quarter an hour. In argument the tramp appeared to have the better of it.

"What's the hurry? Want to see the races, toff?"

"No."

"Any better wevver at Dauncaster?"

"Not that I know of."

"Expect to be any 'appier when yer gits there?"

"Not a bit. I've business there; that's all."

"Ho, that's all? Well, I don't see the bloomin' fun o' makin' yerself a slave to business: not even if it was a cook-shop business—all grub what wasn't profit. If it's strong enough to dror me of itself, let it, I'm open to be 'elped along; if it ain't, let it bide my time."

Beiley found walking on the worst failure of all. The tramp took the opportunity to sit and rest, until the peer returned and started him anew.

"Toff," said the tramp, "I've 'ad a many pals, rank uns too, some, prigs, smashers, busters an' screwsmen, cosh-carriers, sockiters, black blackguards every one on 'em; but I never yet 'ad sich a uncomfortable pal as yerself. Blame me if I wouldn't sooner go co wiv a moty-car, an' find all the snortin' an' puffin', blowin', sneezin', stinkin' an' to-do myself."

So Beiley found that the best he could do was to thrust his hands and his impatience into his pockets, and take equal step for step with the tramp; careful not to assume the part of pace-maker by advancing so much as one inch to the fore or the tramp would immediately hang back, like an unwilling draught-horse that feels the collar; careful also not to fall behind by so much, for the tramp immediately took that as an invitation to stand and recover breath. Still they pro-

gressed, for they crawled out of one man-deserted bird-haunted lane into another and another, and so on to the great highway, which undulated nobly through a generous land of park and wood, of corn and pasturage; a perfect road from the cyclist's point of view, and decorated moreover with a double row of telegraph poles. It was yet such an hour in the afternoon, that they were passed by a few belated motorists and cyclists, scorching along in hope to arrive at Doncaster in time for the great event of the day.

They were however barely two miles nearer to the town when the tide of traffic began feebly to turn the other way; one or two dusty cyclists, a couple of puny dejected town lads, a countryman and his family in a spring-cart drawn by a plodding pony, a farmer of the neighbourhood staggering deviously and stopping every now and then to shed maudlin tears over a rosette of gay ribbons which he carried in his hand, a respectable pink-cheeked papa with his three blooming daughters driving away in their wagonette before the rabble raised the dust, a Punch-and-Judy man carrying his show on his back while dog Toby with a frill round his neck trotted by his side, a trim motor-car fussing along laden with smart people, three or four field-labourers beerily argumentative. Yet more weary pedestrians more or less sober, more vehicles, more bicycles and motor-cars, and that dribble of folk increased gradually to a stream. Whenever Jack the tramp stopped to look on Jack the lord perforce did the like.

They had approached so near the course that they distinctly heard the babel of sounds, exultant shout, disappointed howl, hurrah, boohoo, whistle and roar, which announced the termination of the last race of the day. Through the waftage of the cars dust became the most noticeable ingredient in the air. It overlaid with its own dead earthy hue the living green of tree, hedge and herbage; it fouled everything, it disturbed the breathing and annoyed the eyesight. Perhaps that was why Beiley was so slow in coming to a sense of his

position. He was standing side by side with the tramp, looking at a four-in-hand that was rolling by at a smart trot. Suddenly he was aware that he knew the bearded man with the beribboned whip, knew his moustached friend on the box beside him, knew the lady in the peacock blue, whose beauty was a sort of pink insolence, knew that other lady whose beauty was but a pale languor, knew—in short knew them all. He stood until the coach was out of sight, then went aside by the first gate into a field and sat down under the hedge.

"It's the fust sensible thing y'ave done, toff," said the tramp, "since I've 'ad the honour of knowin' yer. Couldn't yer chew a mite?"

Lord Beiley could not chew, or if he chewed it was such stuff as was dry of nourishment; so the tramp had the bread and cheese which he had brought with him to himself.

An hour later, the throng having diminished to a few stragglers, it was Beiley's imperative will that they should rise and proceed upon their way, not without protest querulously humorous on the tramp's part.

"Blame it, toff," he said, "y'ud oughter bin born a jack-i'-the-box. Them what put a man inside yer spiled yer."

Soon they were passing the race-course, which lay open to the road. The huge expanse, so lately of nature's green, was everywhere defiled by dust, littered with paper, down-trodden by the profane heel of man and disfigured by his waste and disorder. Of all the vast throng which had possessed it there were but the paltry dregs on show; half-a-dozen wheelmen getting their bicycles out of storage, two or three vans full of noisy companions starting for distant towns or villages, little groups of men and boys wrangling over their beer and losses, a couple of stout beefy fellows belabouring a starveling defaulter, a few painted women flaunting their wretched wares and angling for custom, two or three news-vendors proffering the history of the day's races and the prophecy of the morrow's, a tract-distrib-

utor giving away the last of his lightly esteemed pamphlets. The tipsy went off in the slack care of the less tipsy, the stall-keepers were packing up, there were no riders for the gipsy's donkeys, no buyers for the hawker's toffee, few passengers for either horsed vehicle or electric tram. The scavengers were already busy with their necessary brooms. Still here and there idle, hopeless or homeless persons lounged vacuously, sat uncomfortably on the rails and occupied the seats; while to and fro went the police stolidly observant, and over all hung the sullen sky of one indifferent grey.

As Beiley and his companion passed on into the town the numbers which encumbered the streets increased. And now the late sun, which had hidden all day, showed himself through some flaw or threadbare place in his concealment; so however that there was no appearance of riven cloud and peering luminary, but rather of a great sombre curtain hung up behind a red lamp, spherical, magically upheld. That on the left over the housetops; on the right the conspicuous spire of a church, in the midst the rabble and the street. For a minute or two; then the clouds began again to obscure the light-giver, defaced it, ate it away, had their will again completely from zenith to horizon. The spire too was put out of sight by the crowding-in of the houses; only the rabble remained, nay increased the further they advanced into the town. But Beiley drew the tramp into a by-street, spoke confidentially and put a gold pencil-case into his hand, together with the studs which he had before entrusted to him.

"If you can raise five or six pounds on them," he said, "I shall be satisfied. They must be worth at least ten times as much."

The tramp thrust them back into the peer's hand.

"Stow it, toff! sharp! I smells bovver. I ain't partic'lar chice about stinks, I don't expect it to rain eaudy'C'logne, but bovver has a smell that rank I can't abide it."

They returned to the more populous streets, where the

roadway from wall to wall swarmed with a mixed throng of leisurely loungers, elbowing rowdies, felonious loiterers and business men on business intent. While the sounds that occupied the air were as incongruously mingled, holloas, whistles, hoots, subdued tones, curses, cadging whines, the monotonous reiterations of street-vendors, doleful hymn-singing, snatches of vulgar song, empty yells and laughter. The tramp stopped at the first pawnbroker's, otherwise his companion had hardly noticed the golden symbol of the trade and the inscription offering loans upon the security of jewellery, plate and wearing apparel. He had never before been put to his shifts, and the face he turned to the shop door was more than sufficiently tragic. The pause he made before entering was only momentary, but there was time enough for the tramp to stay him by the sleeve.

"'Old 'ard, toff," he said; "a mug like that'll give yer away as safe as if y'ud split on yerself for to git the reward. Gi' me the bits o' red; I'll spout 'em. I don't cotton to bein' put away while there's the chanst o' sunshine, but if I am in for it I may as well be in for it as a principal as a 'cessory."

He took the jewellery back and entered the shop. But it was the races, and besides the broker's assistant had recently caused his employer loss by innocently acting as the receiver of stolen goods; he was eager to re-establish his reputation for acuteness; he easily succeeded in encouraging his first suspicions of his disreputable customer; he sent for the police. Beiley already uneasy at the delay followed the constable in, and saw the tramp at the far end of the shop being confronted by the questioning faces of master, man and police. He went straight up to them.

"I don't want to get this man into trouble," he said. "The things are mine. I am Lord Beiley." The three pairs of questioning eyes were transferred to himself. "Be good enough to let him go. I'm quite ready to make all the explanations that you are entitled to require."

The shabby man's complete courtesy, low-pitched self-assertion, perfect balance, quelled rising suspicion before it had time to shape itself.

"No further explanation required, my lord," said the police-constable with the proper salute.

"If you like to apply in your own person, my lord," said the broker, "there won't be any difficulty about us doing business together. To any amount; on your personal security."

But Beiley was fain to escape the excited curiosity, however veiled with respect, of those half-dozen eyes.

"Thank you," he said, "I will not trouble you any further. Good-day."

Muttered the tramp, "Fink I must 'ave my 'ead pretty well tiled or there wouldn't be a slate left for to keep the rain out arter all this."

He followed Beiley down the street at the proper distance of a hanger-on. Until presently the peer turned and said:

"Come along, Jack."

The tramp shuffled up the two or three yards that separated them.

"So y'er a real all-alive-oh toff arter all?" he said. "How did yer git broke?"

"By my folly. My madness, if you like."

"No chice, toff; if they're boaf same price. I never knowed a madman but what 'e was more or less of a fool."

CHAPTER XXVII

SOLE EXECUTRIX

THEY passed through the market-place, where there were shows and roundabouts and a mob getting what amusement it could out of the din of rival bands, the flare of many unsteady lights, much jostling and uproar, and the sight of two little girls shuffling their satin shoes on a yard's breadth of stage.

"Am I to try my luck agin, toff?" said the tramp, not very willingly.

Beiley espied a pawnshop on the other side of the way.

"Yes. No, thank you."

Perhaps in the non-interval between the yes and the no he had had a flashlight glimpse of the meanness of being the street-loitering sender of such an embassy. He strode across and entered the shop, swallowing by the way a full meal of petty dislikes, squeamishnesses, prides and prejudices. He had been so well educated in the avoidance of all avoidable unpleasantness, that we may surmise he had within his narrower breast something of the swollen feelings of a hero marching towards heroism.

All seemed to be going smoothly. The assistant offered him within ten shillings of the sum he himself mentioned, entered his name without sign of surprise and was engaged on the necessary clerk-work, when the master of the shop came by, made a casual inquiry, flushed all over his pale face and white forehead, sent his man on an errand to the other end of the shop and then put the pledges back in Beiley's hand. He was

a dapper plump fair-haired white-skinned clean-shaven little man, and the pomposity of his manner was mitigated by a slight lisp.

"I regret, my lord," he said—he was already pale again—"that I feel mythelf compelled to decline the tranthaction."

Beiley neither inquired nor went away. He was tired; he did not rise from the chair on which he sat; the tradesman's refusal seemed to arouse no resentment in him nor even curiosity. The tradesman apparently was embarrassed by his remaining.

"I hope your lordthip," he said, "won't inthitht upon an explanation."

Beiley did not even look across at the man's face as he said without emphasis:

"I believe it will be a relief to yourself."

"Quite to the contrary, my lord."

But Beiley's gaze rested aimlessly upon a pair of corduroy trousers, cheap, our own style, eight and six The pawnbroker's eyes measured the sufficiency of the distance from his assistant's ears.

"I have a perthonal reathon, my lord," he said, and again a brief girlish flush overspread his face, "for rethenting that particular form of cruelty. And I quite believe that thome women might feel it more than any man could." He was quite pale again. "I beg leave, my lord, to rethent it not for the man'th thake but the woman'th."

Lord Beiley rose, bowed low to the little pawnbroker, saying:

"Somebody, sir, who is worthy shall thank you for the woman."

He went out. He understood at last that he would have to do something unpleasant one way or another. He returned to the first pawnbroker's.

"Blame my perspicussity if it ain't the boss!"

The words and the well-known voice stayed him even on the threshold of the pawnshop. He turned and beheld Sambo, corked smile, banjo, obesity and all.

"What are you doing here?" said he, apparently having forgotten Sambo's promise to visit Doncaster.

"Trying my luck, boss. Which has resulted in my luck trying me. In other words I'm outside the Sow in Sunshine."

The corked hilarity on Sambo's face was succeeded by a corked depression, well intended, not wholly unsuccessful. Over his shoulder Beiley saw next door the upper storey of a squeezed-in little public-house decorated with the representation of a golden pig wallowing in red paint. He said:

"The musical taste of Doncaster is no better than that of Nesthorpe, I'm afraid."

"I can't complain; considerin' we're now in the present century. Besides it's been a good day for the backers, which always tends to swell the musical instincts of the nation, which is ever sound at 'eart, though sometimes suffers theirselves to be kidded by white calicker, zinc ointment and roodge."

The more bombastic Sambo's language the more successful became his putting-on of depression.

"Then I'm to congratulate you?"

"I accept your congratulations for 'aving earned the tin; and if you've more congratulations left than what you've got friends, I'll accept some for not 'aving invested it in landed property. I laid it all on the favourite. I was told it was a dead certainty, I found it a dead failure. The chap as gave me the tip, I've met him since and he claims it was something to be right about the 'dead.' 'Alf right he called it. Which was all the doctor could say for himself when he introduced the wrong party to the right dose. Stone-broke now spells the condition of my finances, boss, and I don't think yourself's swimming in tenners just now. What do you say to making a pitch round the first quiet corner, us two, boss; again the church, say? Considering the shades of evening are stealing—in fact have already boned everything that's boneable—considering too the day-after-the-party gloom on yer own aristoscratchit

countenance and the general lushiness of our noble patrons the public, I think, as the only original last remaining exponents of 'igh art, we might for once venture to take your corking as done."

It may seem strange, but Lord Beiley was attracted by the proposal; as he would have been by almost anything that offered him an escape from the civilities of that pawnbroking establishment.

"What d'yer say? Don't yer feel a curiosity to try if"—instead of the word Sambo lightly tum-tummed on his banjo the opening strains of 'Dinah'—"will fetch the sympathies of the won't-go-home-till-morning tyke as completely as it did a certain noble lady's, whose name's not to be named in the same breath as booze?"

"Wait here a minute."

With an instantaneous change of front Beiley strode into the shop; he deposited the pledge and returned to the street.

"I'm going to have a cup of tea. Will you come with me?"

"Yours till death, boss. And a plate of 'am, if I might presume."

The tramp went in search of a refreshment house to his own taste; the whilom partners entered the nearest restaurant, which was in such a tumult of coming and going, of ordering and settling, of exulting and disputing, that its staring bedizenments were lost in the general hustle-bustle, noise and dust. With difficulty the two got seated, with more difficulty served in a waiter-forgotten corner behind an unnecessary stove. Such was the preoccupation of everyone's ears with his own voice, that they might have discussed matters more delicate than a man's business credit, more dangerous than his murder without any third body being the wiser. Sambo however was unusually silent, which was acquiesced in by Beiley but which he himself thought it necessary to apologise for.

"What with the plenty o' grit and mustard and real

Yorkshire-'Ampshire smoke, this bit of 'am's as engrossing as love or toothache to a man as hasn't eat anything solid between now and eight o'clock. On my honour, boss, I felt so low just now I was on the brink of buying a box of aperient pills off a cadger with my last penny by way of a tummy-filler; but the box was so little and the tummy so big and empty, that I come round to thinking it ud be a better move, the town being chock-full, to try and let it off as an unfurnished apartment."

After that he again kept a well-occupied silence until he broke it for the grateful acceptance and the vociferous ordering, competitive with many loud voices, of a third plate of ham. But while he was waiting for his plate's tardy re-appearance, and had nothing to do but clear his teeth with tongue and suction of the particles of rich fat and high-flavoured lean which had lodged between them, he said:

"By the bye, boss, I'd almost forgot——"

The pause he made was so significant that Beiley raised his weary eyes from the stained marble of the table. With a smack of loud satisfaction Sambo freed two of his hindmost molars of a fleshy shred unusually stringy and obstinate.

"I've a message for you from a certain lady you and me knows of."

Beiley showed no emotion; perhaps because the paleness of before was so complete that the paleness of after was allowed no room for distinction.

"That is I have it and haven't it, if you understand me."

"I don't."

Sambo put his thumbs in his arm-holes and leaning back tilted his chair up on its hind legs, completely at his leisure.

"It's something like this: Let's suppose I offered you the modest treat of a half-pint, and let's suppose you put out your 'and for it, and let's suppose I let go before you fingered. That ud be a case of 'aving and

not 'aving. Or if you incline to think it ud be slightly more not 'aving than 'aving, I'll give in to you to that extent. Do you tumble to it now?"

"What is it?"

"She rode past next day. I was doing a bit of a turn up in the town, thinking p'raps I shouldn't feel so 'umpish as in the more familiar atmosphere of the sands. It was a third-rate funeral, boss. I treated myself to an extra stiffener or two, but for all they was worth to me they might 'ave been lowering medicine, something to take off fat and put on bile. When she come up I was positively chanting to two perambulators, a sandwich man, a butcher's boy and his basket."

"Well?"

"She chucked me 'alf a dollar and an only 'alf-deserved compliment on the performance. 'Where's your friend?' says she. Wouldn't yer think that by this time they could have fatted a pig, killed it, cured it, growed some parsley, boiled a ham and served 'em both up together?"

"What did you say?"

"I told her you'd chucked the artist and retired into the privacy of private life. 'Why?' says she. 'Becos,' says I——"

But at last the ham had appeared.

"I'm afraid you've 'urried this 'am," said Sambo.

"Not at all, sir," said the waiter.

"It seems all of a sweat; but p'raps it's with business anxieties or religious hydriphobia. Well, remember I shall expect a tip from you when I go."

"From me, sir? Why, sir?"

"Becos it's me that's been the waiter."

"Very good, sir," said the waiter with a smile that had vanished before it had appeared.

Sambo applied himself to the third plate as if it had been the first. Beiley showed no impatience. Presently the mountebank looked up and said through a full mouth:

"Oh, her ladyship! 'Why?' says she. 'Becos,'

says I—Notice that little wizzendy chap who's just rose from the third table from 'ere?"

"No."

"It's Green the famous booky. I'll bet you anything from last Tuesday week to a gold mine, as you couldn't tell from his phiz whether he's ten thousand to the good or the same to the bad to-day. 'Becos,' says I, 'he don't know where his talents lays.' 'I'm afraid that is so,' says she. This 'am reminds me— 'Ave you ever 'eard of the parson as thanked Providence for creating man to eat pig, when it might just as heasy have created pig to eat man?"

"No."

"Oh, a well-known fact; quite 'istorical; that is it may 'ave been or it mayn't 'ave been. But Lady—hm —'Afraid that is so,' says she. 'Shall you be seeing him again soon?' 'If I don't, yer ladleship,' says I, dropping into the artist, 'it'll only be becos he ain't in sight. But dere am finny fishes—I mean finny-ties between us, which if all de lies dat folks say am true, won't let us stop apart.' 'If you do,' says she, 'you might——' At that moment there come a look over her face as if she was spotting a lady friend's bonnet a mile off, or doing a hard compound substraction sum in her own 'ead. 'I's listenin', yer ladleship,' says I, 'but I don't 'ear nuffin but 'fresh mackerel, three a shillin'.' She come out of her arethmetic face, drew off her left-'and glove—there was a ring on that 'and as shone like a Drury Lane sunset—and says, 'Tell him as——' But she saw my attention was on 'er 'and and says, 'Are you a judge of rubies?' 'So much so,' says I, 'that I don't know when I see one from when I don't.' 'Well,' says she, 'will you please say——' Then just when the int'rust was coming in the same thing happened as the day afore. 'Er 'orse ran away with her again. I watched her out o' sight with sympathy; for I've been run away with once myself. A once which I can assure you don't mean twice."

Beiley rose with an abruptness that compelled Sambo

to compress his last three mouthfuls into one; a necessity which effectually gagged him from that final humorous altercation with the waiter which he had promised himself. The tramp was waiting at the door. Beiley put a sovereign into the minstrel's hand.

"I feel," said Sambo, "as if I'd had a fortune left me, boss. D'yer know what I'm going to do with this 'ere last instance of your magnaminity? I'm going straight to Deborah; as straight circumbendibus as the Great Northern can take me. From 'alf past five, p.m., till I'd the good luck to meet yourself, I'd been ockipying myself principally in promising myself to do it with the first quid I made; and I'm going to do it. True; no kid."

"You've made up your mind?"

"No, she has."

"Good luck go with you," said Lord Beiley.

The remainder of the pawn-money he divided between himself and his new comrade, and by half past ten the two arrived at Hull.

At ten o'clock next morning Beiley stood once more outside the money-lender's door. Above the soiled steps the door stood wide open, but with a mercenary hospitality. On either side the entrance was decorated with a large poster announcing the sale that day by auction by order of the sole executrix of the late J. H. Percival Esquire, deceased, of the superior household furniture and office fittings thereunder enumerated. While he stood and looked down the columns of items blankly with a mere appearance of reading, the porter who stood in his shirt-sleeves on the top of the steps addressed him.

"Yer can coom in; they're on view."

He went in, out of a present inability to set his feet and intentions in another direction. There was the usual gathering in the dirty passages and disconsolate furniture-lumbered rooms of pencil-sucking dealers, of parties about to marry, of bargain-hunting women and aimless idlers. He went through every room and saw

nothing. He had just regained the street, when Miss Percival in all the ostentation of deep mourning stepped out of a brougham to the pavement. He hoped to pass unrecognized; but she immediately addressed him.

"You have come to see me?"

"I came," he stammered, "hoping—expecting—to see——"

"Ah well, that's the same thing now, you know. Come in."

She led him into one of the smaller rooms. She was at first for shutting the door, but on second thoughts left it open.

"I might be shutting out a buyer, you see," she said.

"I regret to hear of your loss," said he.

"Thanks awfully. I was a great deal more cut up than anybody would think; though I don't pretend, and never did, to approve of all the pater's investments. I considered that with such a fortune as ours we were entitled to put security before everything. It was the only serious difference of opinion we ever had, that's some comfort. You haven't settled that little affair of yours yet, I see. You must be awfully wanting in *savoir faire*. And you're looking simply ghastly."

"I came hoping to arrange—but of course—now——"

"Another advance? I knew you would come again. But I've quite shut up shop, you see. I intend henceforth to be the lady and nothing but the lady. I've had a thousand per cent. offered me without tempting me one scrap. All outstanding business I've put into my solicitor's hands. Of course I shall keep a sharp eye on him in a ladylike sort of way."

Hereupon a man and a woman entered the room to look at lot 112, coal-box and pair of pictures. Miss Percival, desirous not to hamper their discussion, drew Beiley out and finished the colloquy on the landing, which happened just then to be clear.

"The pater has left everything to me. But of course he was too level-headed to fritter away his money on

distant relatives or hospitals or other nonsense. He cut up unexpectedly fat. He trusted me, you know, but he didn't tell me everything. That's as it should be; one should always know a little more, think a little more and have a little more than one lets on. If you married me it would be so with me; I should be often giving you little surprises one way or another. You needn't fear you'd find me monotonous."

They had to stand aside to let two porters and a chest of drawers go by. Then she resumed:

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"A nice age for the man. I'm twenty-one."

She looked rather more; but perhaps she was providently beginning already to reserve little surprises for him.

"You may enter it in your note-book that I turn the scale at half a million. I shan't need to advertise myself. I've had heaps of very decent offers already."

"I hope you will be happy," said Beiley very coldly, "with the man of your choice."

"I mean to be happy, with him or without him. Why shouldn't I be? I'm rich, young, good-looking, healthy and sensible. That last's a more important item, I believe, than you quite grasp."

A lady who was passing, an acquaintance it seemed of Miss Percival's, stopped to shake hands and with a congratulatory-condoling face to inquire after her health.

"Thanks awfully, I'm quite as well as could be expected. Just stop a minute." That to Beiley, who was offering to take his leave. "It has been such a fearful shock."

"I think you bear up wonderfully. I can hardly realize it myself, dear, yet. I've just run in to look at the blankets; I could do with a couple of pairs of really good ones."

"They are in the first room on the next floor. I shall see you again before you go."

The friend passed on.

"One's obliged to talk so," said Miss Percival, "to people of a certain class. I've known for years it has been touch-and-go with the pater; so why should I be obliged to be surprised? I can be reasonably sorry without any fuss."

"Allow me to——"

"One moment. I think you're making a mistake. I'm a good manager both of men and money. I can't give the pater as a reference. I should have kept you out of further mischief, you may rely on that. Again, I've a good deal to say for myself and you appear to have very little. Just the proper contrast. Must you go? Well, au revoir. If within a reasonable time you'd like to buy your watch back I dare say my solicitor could arrange with you. His address is on the bills."

This new disappointment was to Beiley like that douse of cold water which assists the resolution of a bed-bound sluggard. Nevertheless his inclination was still towards waiting to be helped out rather than coming out. He met Jack the tramp according to agreement outside his hotel.

"What's the next town the other side of Doncaster?" asked he.

"'Pends which road yer goes," answered the tramp. "There's Sopworth one road, there's Rother'am another."

"Sopworth will do."

Lord Beiley's recollection of the name of the little town whither he had gone with Bertha in the motor-car was latent, but perhaps unconsciously influenced his selection. He re-entered the hotel and straightway wrote a letter to his agent, containing these instructions:

"Address by return to Mr. John Johnson, Poste Restante, Sopworth, £500 in small notes.

"Post anonymously two £50 notes to Dr. Beardsley, Lossington, Notts; one in recognition of his

services to two late patients of his, the other towards the institution of a parish nurse at Lossington.

"As soon as I hear from you it is my intention to leave the country. I will keep you informed of my whereabouts. But I desire this and all my future communications to be a strict secret between you and me."

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN THE PARK

LORD BEILEY rested his leg that day and on the following one travelled by rail to Sopworth. For the better disguise he had not except in the matter of clean linen made any alteration in his dress. He called at the post-office, but there was nothing for John Johnson. His agent was taking a holiday on the Continent, and as his envelope was marked "private" with a double underlining it had been forwarded unopened. Not knowing this he thought only of occupying with something a little less irksome than vacancy the two or three hours until the next post. The sun shone brightly and perhaps influenced his choice of direction. Anyhow he and the tramp set their faces towards it, and strolled away from the little town by a footpath which led southwards through gently rising enclosures of very light land. The haze that obscured the horizon told of the heat; save for that the sky was of a faultless blue; the air was still; the hum of an industrious bee as it visited in turn each bell of a solitary foxglove was a fuller sound in their ears than that far-off town-ward chime. Yet man-made things being so much nearer to our thoughts than things natural, it was of the latter that the tramp spoke.

"'Twas a downy dodge o' the parsons to kid the folks into comin' an' 'earin' an' bein' collected wiv a dinner bell. It ud be a rare draw the fust time. But strike me, what I can't understand is, as it continues to be a draw. Folks can't any on 'em, y'ud think, be

made so judgmentless in their innards as to take psalm an' sarmon for a bellyful."

After two miles of field walking they passed by a bridle-gate into a nobly-timbered park. There was sunshine in the broad drives, shade under the thick trees and an interchange of both along the grassy walks. They sat or sauntered; their loitering had not the conscious toil of an aim. The day having reached its summit seemed to brood there, resting from the long ascent, deferring for a little while the easy labour of decline. The woodland sounds, being natural, were such as did not break its rest. A jay uttered a departing scream; a disputatious squirrel chattered from a safe bough; a rabbit scampered through the fallen leaves; an unseen woodpecker tapped.

Beiley had been there before but his recognition was tardy. There is some excuse. Woodland scenery does not offer itself to the eye with the brazen effrontery of the street. Its beauties are coy nymphs that peep and hide, hide and peep; not to speak of the wide seasonal variations, they change momentarily with the changing day and disdain to wear the same dress for a second glance. Besides his eyes were not entirely outward that day; they were largely upon the future and more especially upon the past. For a long time he had not spoken; the tramp's passing remarks went for nothing. All at once, whether by the medium of sight or mere sensation, he became aware that the sun was getting low. It was at the meeting of two walks. He stood as though purposing to return. At the same instant it came to him that he knew the place; he remembered walking there during his stay with Mrs. Houghton. And Mrs. Houghton and Bertha were before him. Possibly the subtle stimulus of their unseen presence had excited the sluggish recognition of his eyes. It was too late to turn, to depart, to flee, for Bertha had seen him.

"Jack!" she cried, and ran up to him. She had a doll in her arms.

"That's my name, missy, sure enough," said the tramp.

The child turned her eyes on him with a disgusted surprise which Beiley felt as an accusation against himself.

"A friend of mine, Bertha," he said, "to whom I owe my life."

Mrs. Houghton came forward and offered the tramp her hand. At first the tramp did not seem to know what to do with it, had perhaps expected to see a penny in it, at the most a shilling in it. Finally he took in the full extent of the offer and clumsily, sheepishly put his hand to the lady's.

"All Mr. Jack's friends," she said, "are indebted to you."

"You're making too much of my life, madam," said Beiley.

"Did you get my letter, Jack?" said Bertha.

"Yes, thank you."

"Then why didn't you write back?"

"Will you permit me, sir," said Mrs. Houghton, "to speak a few words with you?"

Beiley bowed and went with her a few paces apart. Bertha looked on the tramp with curiosity.

"Other Jack," she said, "what does Jack mean by 'owe my life'?"

"'E was in a burnin' 'ole, missy, an' 'e will 'ave it as I pulled 'im out; that's all."

"I'm one of Jack's friends, Other Jack, so I'm debted to you."

She put out her dainty little hand; and the tramp, better instructed, did not look for a penny in it, but forthwith allowed it to grasp his own by two grimy fingers.

Meanwhile Mrs. Houghton in that leafy privacy took Beiley so far as she might into her confidence.

"Sir," she said, "we have had a visit, more than one visit, from a friend of yours."

"Have I any friends?"

"You have. Oh, be assured you have! You are entitled to resent my interference as a piece of impertinence, but I can't help making it. Why don't you go back?"

Beiley answered, but with difficulty, after a pause and much search for an escape from answering.

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't feel quite obliged."

"O my lord—sir—forgive me, but happiness is so brief!" The tears that did not fall were more than the words. "You are wasting the precious moments. Of another's happiness as well as your own. Dare you do that?"

"You're greatly mistaken, madam, if you think that what I've done is the outcome of daring. It has been cowardice, nothing but cowardice, rank cowardice. And I'm a coward still."

"Then my prayer shall be that courage may be granted you. It's all you need. Believe me; all. But there's another matter, trifling in comparison to you, though great to us; that ring which you gave to Bertha."

"She gave me one too."

He showed the bead ring which still decorated his little finger.

"I thought I ought not to allow her to retain a gift of such value."

"You could not refuse, under the circumstances."

"That friend of yours was of the opinion that I ought not to refuse."

"You would shrink from compelling me to return Bertha's."

"What shall you think of me? Yours has left my possession. That lady was very desirous of having it herself."

"Why?"

"She thought it unnecessary to tell me; surely it should be unnecessary to tell you. The only difficulty in acceding to her request was one raised by herself."

"What was that?"

"She insisted upon giving in return the full value of the ring to be settled upon Bertha. Such a sum as would ensure her an excellent education whatever happened to me. The temptation was great; for my little one's sake I allowed myself to be persuaded that you would approve. Did I do right?"

"You did quite right. As indeed you always must; both you and she."

"Bertha!" They had come out again into the open; and the moment that Mrs. Houghton looked back and called Bertha ran up to them. "Should you like to go to Mansfield Grammar School for Girls when you're old enough?"

"Like Lucy Mayhew? Yes, mother."

"Then thank Mr. Jack."

Standing a-tiptoes the child put up her lips all on the pout to kiss and be kissed, red lips in a pale face.

"My thanks are only additional," said Mrs. Houghton, "but——"

The tears fell which before had refused to fall, tears that were companions to the smile upon the lips, tears that were co-partners with the deep-seated regret.

"Not another word, if you will be so kind," said Beiley; "I'm ashamed already."

The tramp was just in sight, sitting on the protuberant root of an oak with his back to its bole, his gaze slackly aimed through the foliage at the bluest of the sky.

"A lady has been to see us, Jack," said Bertha, while her mother turned away and secretly wiped her eyes; "three times, several times. She knows you. When I told her I called you Jack she said I was to call her Sally. She gave me this dolly. But I forgot. My friend Jack; my dolly Miss Montague. Now you may kiss her. Kiss him, dolly love; it's quite proper; he's our great friend."

She held the dolly up and it was kissed.

"Now be quiet a little while, darling, whilst I talk

to Jack. See the love! She has shut her eyes, she can't hear a word. What a funny man that is! He likes warm water to wash in better than cold because there's allus less of it. We're friends because he owed your life; but I wish there was more hot water where he lives. Is he a friend of Sally's too?"

"I think not," said Beiley.

"I think not too. But then you never know. You may think and think and think a thing, and yet it *won't* be true. Why? Is it because God thinks something else first?"

"It must be so."

"Yes, it must be so. And He's sure to be first, isn't He, because He gets up so early? He *has* to get up before the sun and the wind and the little birds. Look at the sweet! She has opened her eyes again. She understands every word we say. Don't you, my precious? She loves to talk about God. She's going to marry a clergyman when she's grown up. That's why she doesn't smile so much as dolly Jacintha. She does smile, you know, but inside her mouth behind her darling teeth. Jacintha is growing out of her contistution, you'll be glad to hear. She and this precious are the intimest of friends. Jack, Sally has been to Nesthorpe, and I've been there too. I asked her why she went, and she said she went for her health. And I said I went for my health. And then we laughed, both of us; it's so very funny to go anywhere for your health. Did you go to Nesthorpe for your health too, Jack?"

"Yes."

"How very funny! Why don't you laugh? Isn't it funny?"

"Very funny."

Mrs. Houghton covered his failure of a laugh by saying:

"What else did you talk to the lady about, Bertha?"

As though she knew that the question was what he was longing to ask and durst not.

"Oh, we talked about you, Jack, and then we talked about mother, and then we talked about you, and then we talked about my garden, and then—then we talked about you again. Do you know her?"

"What is she like?"

"Oh, she is nice; the nicest next to mother. And she has a shiny brooch, very like an S and not at all like an S, you know."

The irrepressible question was self-put by Beiley, with a quick alternation of yes and no. The yes was first, the no held the field. No, it was not the monogrammatic brooch, his betrothal gift.

"And she wears her hair all on the top of her head. And she has a beautiful——"

The prattle ceased as though Bertha was weighing a doubt.

"A beautiful face?" suggested Beiley.

"Yes—no—I— A beautiful——"

"Dress?"

"Ladies don't bicycle in beautiful dresses, they bicycle in peropriate dresses. A beautiful——"

"What?"

"I don't know where she was beautiful; I think she must have been beautiful all over. *Do* you know her?"

"I think I do."

Mrs. Houghton allowed her presence again to be remembered.

"Your room, sir, is still unoccupied," she said.

"You're too good. Yet I should like to sleep in it one night before I go away."

"Why not to-night?"

"Would to-morrow be equally convenient?"

"Oh yes."

He had proposed the morrow, which was Saturday, in momentary hope of a Sunday with her and Bertha; but no sooner was his question uttered than he saw a hedge and a sword.

"I beg your pardon, I would say Monday."

"Certainly. We shall look forward to the pleasure of seeing you on that day."

"But you'll write me an answer to my letter?" said Bertha.

"Yes."

"A whole letter?"

"Yes."

"Not a picture post-card instead?"

"No."

"A picture post-card as well?"

"Yes."

"Did you damage that that I couldn't spell?"

"I'm afraid I did."

"Can it be mended?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Oh, you must let mother try; she's wonderful with broken chimney ornaments and"—with a quick apprehensive down-glance at her doll she dropped her voice to a whisper—"and dollies' heads. Hush! Will you bring it with you?"

"Yes."

"Good-bye, Other Jack."

"Good-bye, missy."

Lady and little girl again shook hands with the tramp and went their way; the lord and the loafer went theirs.

"'Twouldn't be 'ealthy for me to see that there little lady often," said the tramp.

"Why so?"

"If I did I dunno but what I might some'ow feel obliged to wash my 'ands odd times wivvout any need or necessity."

"I don't know that it would spoil you."

"Oh, toff! It ud knock off 'alf the diff'rence atween bein' put away and discharged wiv a caution."

"They make you wash at the workhouses too, don't they?"

"So they does, toff. There they scores one agin hus. But it ud be rather rough on us, doncher think, to expect us to play their game for 'em?"

CHAPTER XXIX

ORGANIZED CHARITY

On his return Beiley called again at the post-office, but still there was no letter for a person of the name of Johnson; nor yet on the second day nor the third, which was Sunday. He and the tramp spent the intervening time in dodging the weather. Meanwhile P.C. Magson had his eye upon them, and was more occupied with unfavourable guesses at their business in Sopworth than they suspected. Those were days of alternating rain and fine. The weariness of time-killing had been known to Lord Beiley, but that was when the only thing that troubled him was the disease of too much ease. Now his cash in hand had again almost run out; his leg being still incompletely healed it was painful to him to be constantly afoot, and yet the uneasiness of his mind was such that he could not sit and rest. He was wise so far, instinctively. Apart from that supreme agony which is incompatible with life, there is hardly a care but we can make it more oppressive by walling ourselves in with it. Let us go out with our grief, if we cannot leave it behind in the house. The joy of the earth is beyond all other things communicable. The touch of the air, the buffet of the storm, the general voice, which is pure song, have an insinuating way with them; we shall hardly escape distraction, hardly indeed consolation, even while we are damning ourselves to despair.

Beiley did not return to the park in which he had met Mrs. Houghton and Bertha, but there are haunts enough in the neighbourhood of Sopworth where a

man may hide himself away in a green solitude. The tramp with his habitual indolent acceptance of the surroundings followed whither he was led, his complaints against the rain merely humorous and conversational. But there is no living thing, it would appear, so indolent that it can be absolutely vacant without ailing somewhat in mind or body. On the Saturday he became almost pathetic about one house which they passed, a largish detached house, separated from the road by a screen of evergreens.

"Lemme go in there, toff," he whined, "an' do a bit o' patter to the slavey. It's a bone crib. I sh'd be as sure of a copper or two as if I 'ad 'em in my 'and and my 'and in my pocket."

"You may the day after to-morrow if we've no better luck."

They had just passed the town-hall and its clock.

"Four o'clock a Monday. It's a fast un."

That same day Beiley left his comrade to take a midday sleep under a tree in the park which they most frequented, and walked on a mile or two. During which he chanced upon the old stone-breaker of whom he had once earned a shilling. He spoke to him, recalling the incident, but the old man, screwing up his eyes and pursing his mouth until his face was all wrinkles, refused to recognize in him his former journeyman.

"No, no," said he, "'twain't do, 'twere non yo; 'e were a softer-languaged sort o' man."

"I gave you a sovereign change instead of a shilling."

"Yo're fause.[1] Somebody moot a telled yer. But nayther yo nor him as gied me it can hae it back, for I've made it ower to the missis an' she's put it away. When she's put a thing away, yer might as well try to raise the deäd as get it again."

"I don't want it back."

"Then what do yer want? Employment? Nay, nay, I dussn't; I shall niver hear the last from the missis o' that tother shillin'." He looked at Beiley

[1] Cunning.

with a blear-eyed wistfulness. "I don't regret it though; I think o' them touches o' the hat twenty times a day; I'd sooner be buried wi'out a hafe-crown each for the bearers and a bottle o' port wine for the murners nor a missed 'em."

The old fellow turned away and began to chip at a stone with the mien of one resisting temptation. He ceased chipping, he turned again to Beiley with the relieved expression of one who has given in to temptation.

"Would yer do it again for the price of a hafe-pint?"

"I'll do it again for nothing," said Beiley; and did it.

The old man stood a minute as though tasting and testing, then shook his head in disappointment.

"No, no," said he, "it hain't the same flaviour. I reckon money moot pass to mek it taste oat tasty."

He put his hand doubtfully into his breeches pocket. Beiley did not wait for the issue of the contention between poverty and desire; he bade him good-day and walked on.

On Monday afternoon Beiley might have been more successful at the post-office, but with the unhappiness that still attended him he inquired in the name of Jackson. On receiving an answer in the negative he bethought himself and substituted the name of Johnson. The post-master was a waspish little person with a pimply forehead and prying eyes. While he cashed a money-order for a young tradesman from across the way, he peered suspiciously at Beiley over the counter. He saw a shabbily dressed man with the mark of weather upon his outside and a general air of unprosperity; who had not even the addition which a clean skin always gives to a man's respectability, for his hands were soiled by contact with a mossy roadside elm-tree under which he had taken shelter during a shower, and on one cheek he bore unwittingly a splash of mud, the gift of a passing carriage. So it was with no show of respect that the post-master said:

"Now which is it, Johnson or Jackson?"

The tradesman remained, a stout merry-faced person, a grocer in shirt-sleeves and white apron, and seemed to take much jocular interest in the dialogue.

"Johnson, if you please," answered Beiley.

"Then why did you say Jackson?"

"It was a slip."

The grocer laughed genially. The post-master exchanged a halfpenny stamp for the equivalent coin with a servant-maid, and then continued:

"Are you a resident at Sopworth?"

"No, I'm only passing through; I'm staying at the Leopard."

"Good beds and a pretty barmaid," said the grocer.

"Have they booked you under the name of Jackson or Johnson?"

"Neither."

"What then?"

"Wilson."

"Another slip?"

The grocer laughed again.

"I was within my right in giving them an assumed name."

The post-master turned away to register a letter for a gentleman. He seemed to have forgotten Beiley, but the grocer thought otherwise. He went to the door to make sure that he was not wanted in his own shop, then remained with a twinkle in his eye that was partly recollective, partly anticipatory. In about five minutes the post-master, being free, took up the dialogue where he had dropped it.

"May-be, may-be, but you aren't within your right in giving the P.O. an assumed name; the P.O. doesn't recognize assumed names."

Another stoppage while the post-master with waspish painstaking explained to a fussily so-sorry-to-trouble-you lady, how she might most cheaply change nine and elevenpence ha'penny for postal orders. Then he again took it up.

"What is your real name?"

"I choose to be known by the name of Johnson."

"Except at the Leopard?" said the grocer merrily.

"What is your permanent address—if you have one?"

"Or a few of them?" said the grocer.

"Stoke Clure, Hampshire."

"That's one of them?" asked the post-master.

"Yes."

And the grocer laughed more merrily than ever. The maid-servant had remained; an errand-boy who came for a packet of post-cards remained; a clerk who stepped in to set his watch by the post-office time remained; the lady remained and was elaborately studying a notice about the mail for Hong Kong.

"Is there anybody in the town who knows you?"

"No."

Even as he answered there was a general direction of eyes, all but his own, towards the door, through which Jack the tramp wondering and wearying at the delay was peeping, a passing appearance but as unmistakably vagabondish as manifestly in waiting.

"Come," said the grocer, "isn't that gent a friend of yours?"

"Yes."

And there was a general laugh; even the lady tittered over the notice about Hong Kong.

Said Beiley, "I undertake to name the sender of the letter and its contents. You may open it yourself, and if my description is incorrect, you've only to send for the police."

The post-master shook his head impatiently.

"I've no power to do that. Can you name the office where it was posted?"

"Probably either Stoke Clure or London."

"There's always at least two of them," said the grocer.

Again the post-master shook his head.

"Oh, there are three, are there?" said the jocular grocer.

"I'm not satisfied," said the post-master with waspish emphasis. "I shall refer to head-quarters."

"If I procure an authorization from my correspondent?" said Beiley.

"You may, but anyhow I decline to do anything until I've referred."

Beiley telegraphed to his agent and went out. He returned to the post-office in about two hours, when he had been told that he might reasonably expect a reply from Mr. Fasson; but being undesirous of entering the post-office unnecessarily he stopped a person in the road and would have asked the hour. It was a black-coated well-dressed man with an air of gold-spectacled respectability and well-fed benevolence. At the same moment the town-hall clock hard by struck four, and the tramp was tempted by the stranger's apparent softness.

"Would you be good enough——"

"Couldn't y'elp two pore chaps, sir, to a night's lodgin', genuine workin'-men out o' work?"

If events are to be divided into fatalities and non-fatalities, a division which seems to be demanded by the exigencies of fine writing, fatality it must be called that there should have been a policeman within beck. The gentleman's finger went up, P.C. Magson came across, the charge was given.

"I'm a subscriber to the Society for Organizing Charity, I can't allow myself to be solicited in the street."

"I didn't solicit you," said Beiley.

"You were the first to address me."

"I was about to ask the time."

"That's a likely tale," said the policeman. "I've had suspicions of yer for a week or more."

"It were me, guv'nor," said the tramp. "My pal didn't say nuffin. He's a toff, a reg'lar hout-an'-outer, and wouldn't——"

"Hold your tongue, Jack," said Beiley.

"You admit," said the gentleman, "that you are working together?"

"I only admit that I was in his company."

"I knew I should catch yer before long," said the policeman. "Do you charge 'em both, sir?"

"Certainly."

The tramp turned on his accuser, most composedly indignant.

"Where did yer prig that theer 'Oly Joe mug? But I reckon some'dy else done the priggin' and you done the profit, like the sneakin' old file that y'are. I'd shell out a bob for a front seat to see yer sentenced to two stretch 'ard for receivin'. A bloke like you'd ought to be made to swop faces wiv a snark or else to put a bill up in yer top-storey winder: 'Beware of this 'ere nigger. By horder.' I've done. Only mark this; what I've cheeked yer, I've cheeked on my own. P'raps yer'll swear as he said it?"

"You may rely upon it," said the subscriber to the Society for Organizing Charity, "that I shall only swear to the facts of the case."

"Oh well then, remember you've promised not to swear as you're a gentleman. I shall be a-watchin' on yer. I'm dry, bobby; run us in. I'm as dry as yer was yerself afore the landlord of the Fox an' Gun let yer in at the back door."

Perhaps what most astounded Lord Beiley was that the thing was done so easily, nobody but himself appearing to see anything extraordinary in it. While he felt as though there were a collapse of *rerum natura* imminent, prosecutor and policeman, comrade and bystander were evidently not going to let it interfere with the digestion of their last meal or their full enjoyment of the next. One boy did indeed follow them as far as the police-station, whistling "Hold the Fort," but out of the mere vacancy of a boy upon an errand; he stopped twice by the way, to look into an apple shop and to exchange irrelevant insults with a youthful friend. That he, a Briton, could not be deprived of liberty without a sympathetic general disturbance, had been more than an article of faith with Viscount Beiley, it was the

basis of his security; and now an uplifted finger, two or three passionless words, a short walk down an unconcerned street, and lo! he was behind a locked door, unfree to come or go, bereft of self-mastery, the slave of other men, quite vulgar men. He was shaken, bewildered, confounded, broken; he was reduced, despoiled, stripped. Every rag of superfluity gone, he had nothing left but what was common. At last he had come down to the general level. And by what headlong road had he made so speedy a descent? By some stupendous crime? By some far-fetched folly? Or at least by some extraordinary laxity?

He sat down on the bare hard plank that was his ordinary seat, his lounge, his bed, his chair of state in one, and thought it out. Not in that orderly sequence which leads from data to conclusion by a made road, quiet, direct, secure; nay, but like a man in a wood without direction, like a ship in a storm without a rudder, like a dog in the night, if you will, without a master. So his reasonings jumbled cause and effect, made therefore precedent to because, crowned perhaps with a verily, turned and returned in a blind gyration. Yet even in such a state of confusion he could not piece his egoisms together into any flimsy appearance of excuse; there was nothing even to make a bad boast of; the bravest of his misdoing was merely weak and pitiable, hardly short of laughable. Look as he might—and he looked intensely though by such transient gleams, in such inconsequent directions—pick and choose as he might, he could not find anything in his conduct but what was common; common in the impulse, common in the deed, common too in the success.

CHAPTER XXX

A DEAR HALF-CROWN'S WORTH

JACK the tramp and Jack the lord were taken before the magistrates next morning. The chairman was a nobleman who had a seat in the neighbourhood and was very well known to Lord Beiley. But we rarely see what we are not looking for; and the last thing Lord Selstone was looking for was an acquaintance of his in either of those vagrants who hung their heads before him in the dock. It must be noted too that the peer's figure was concealed by an ill-fitting coat; that his face was tanned by exposure, masked by an untrimmed beard and hair, disguised by the self-torment of his thoughts and the reflected humiliation of his position. The case of Jack the tramp, a person well known to the police, did not hang. The bench sentenced him to six weeks' hard labour without deliberation, and he received it without surprise.

"Though I shall be sorry to lose three weeks of the huntin' season, my lord," he said.

His lordship was a keen sportsman; he felt the force of the plea. A smile spread from him along the bench on either hand, and in a jocular commiseration which was mere self-indulgence the time was reduced by a fortnight. In gratitude quoth Jack:

"I 'ope y'ull apply the twopence three farthings fun' upon my pusson to pay for yer 'untin' ball."

"And you, my man, what is your occupation?" asked his lordship of his lordship.

Beiley felt as though he were hung up between earth

and heaven; as though nothing remained to be concealed.

"I don't know," he answered.

If he had had his wits about him he might have answered: A self-indulgence that was too vapid a thing to be called amusement, a languor that was too wearisome to be called ease, a doubt that was too futile to be called scepticism, a dissatisfaction that was too inert to be called revolt.

"Do you mean," asked the chairman, "that you have never earned any money at any trade whatever?"

Beiley's recollections went backward through the slothful record, item by item, with an unhasting finger that passed nothing by. He had no thought to hide anything; he felt hung up. If he had been again asked his name he would have answered truly.

"As a musician," he said at last hoarsely, remembering Nesthorpe.

"Ah? It would hardly be vocal. What instrument?"

"The bones and banjo."

There was the general laugh.

"Anything else?"

Backward again travelled the finger of his memory, line by line, futile item after futile item, checking everything.

"Yes, at stone-breaking."

Again the laugh, louder, more general. He remembered, as a far-off thing, that he too had sat on high apart and allowed himself to be languidly amused by the follies of poor un-Etoned unancestored wretches.

"Look at his hands," said the chairman.

Lord Beiley's nearer hand was just lifted and dropped by the policeman who stood over him and said:

"They're not the hands of a working-man, your lordship."

A word went from the chairman under-breath and a slight glance to right and left meeting glance.

"The police know nothing against you," said he,

"so we are willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. Will you leave the town at once if you're let go?"

"Yes," said Beiley.

"I should advise you to take to the bones again; they mayn't be so lucrative but they'll be safer."

"Congratulate yer, toff," said the tramp. "That shows the advantage of 'avin' no character. Ta-ta, my lord."

"Stop!" said the chairman. "Do you know a man named Half White?"

"Yes," answered Beiley.

"I thought so. He played the bones too."

Alf White indeed, commonly known as Half White, had been Bones in the Negro minstrel troupe of which Beiley had once been a member. He perceived that he had been suddenly recognized. He passed out. Through the town street, the hedge-guarded road, the open woodlands, he walked without the whip of a purpose; he had fallen completely at last into the pace of the loafer, of him who neither goes from anything nor towards anything. His mind was a common street to the passage of random recollections; his ears were but thoroughfares to sound; his eyes mere windows, to which the scarecrow in the standing wheat had the same value as the man stowking the cut oats. And so the day passed, night fell, and he did not appreciate the difference between whole sun and three-quarter moon. He had not rested, had not eaten, had felt neither the desire nor the need of food. The stealthy uneasy clouds that lurked about the moon were ever taking and giving back. Now she shone fully out, either sole or in company with one bright planet; now she would be merely veiled, now lost or nearly lost for a minute behind their encroachments. The rest of the sky was covered by the almost uniform wanness of cloud or mist, save that between moon and southern horizon there was always the brooding of something darker, more threatening.

Without the conscious check of his volition his foot was stayed in its one-mile-an-hour shuffle. Immediately

he was aware of a voice, a child's voice, that he knew, singing:

"The sun still shines although we cannot see,
Still birdies sing and little children play;
I do not fear if in the dark I be,
For God remains and it is always day."

He stood, though his impulse was to fly. He recognized the front of Mrs. Houghton's cottage; heard the murmur of her voice through the open window; also heard another woman's voice, younger, fresher, more forcible; which also he knew. From time to time he saw shadows on the blind, a little one's and two women's, one slenderer than the other. He felt utterly outside. A woman whose figure tallied with the younger voice came to the door and looked forth. He cowered in the shade until she went in again; then he walked away. He had felt despair before, but in parcels; now he possessed it in the gross, the complete round of it, incapable of addition.

He was nerve-shaken too; all his courage seemed to have been carried off by the woman whom he had seen at the door. Twice he thought he heard a voice behind him and fled out of the direct way to avoid imaginary pursuit. The second time he went aside into a mere rutty track, so thickly overhung by trees that but a glimmer of moonshine got through. The screech of an owl questing along the woodside was indistinguishable from the voice of his own despair.

Not far and the trees ceased to press upon his path; save single ones which close by were clearly visible, every leaf of them, but a few paces off appeared in quick gradation like a low cloud suspended in the air, like a breaking cloud without outline, like a cloud which as you look fades away in rain.

Soon he saw a hovel in a field by the lane side; a forlorn erection overhung by a gaunt elm. Such as it was it put him in mind of rest; being minded of rest he became aware of his utter weariness, became weighed

down by it, overcome by it. He resolved to go in and pass the night there; perhaps there would be a bunch of hay or mouldy straw for pillow to his heavy head. He did not act at once on his resolution; he was in such a state that immediate action on any impulse less urgent than terror was impossible; he stood and looked. The moon, now westering and more and more encroached on by the clouds, was a mere wraith and of a ghastly green. Through the broken walls the phantoms of its shine came and went.

"Ay, another man hanged hissen in theer."

Close by him stood a man whom he had not seen before; a roughly dressed countryman with a halter in his hand. Beiley, startled by the sudden appearance, said:

"Where did you come from?"

The man laughed. His face seemed to be haggard and his eyes wild. Mayhap he had been drinking; but then he, like everything else, was subject to the wan weird transformations of the moon.

"For love. Think o' that!" He laughed again. "The tomfool! As if there warn't plenty of things he could have hanged hissen for sensibly. I'll show yer how 'e did it if yer like. There's noat like knowing."

The man went through the gate into the field. Beiley followed; his very horror seemed to draw him on. Their coming disturbed a peewit, which rose and circled above their heads uttering his loud wail, a flitting apparition, so near that they could hear the hum of his wings.

There was no door to the shed. The broken moonshine that came thievishly through the rents in thatch and wall was only enough to divide a single darkness into a heap of quivering, shuddering wraiths. The man went in; Beiley followed, though his skin was all a-prick. The man struck a match and raising it showed him the beam to which the fatal rope had been fastened.

"Just a such un as this helter," said he.

The light went out before Beiley was sure whether or not there was a shred of rope still hanging. The

man struck another match and holding it low showed him marks upon the earthen floor, a cross-work of scratches.

"Jack Caunt's toes made 'em," he said, "in his last merry dance. He gave hissen a inch too much rope—'e were allus a bit that-a-way—and so couldn't make a clean swing on't." He laughed. "Shouldn't yer like to have seed it? It moot have been a funnier sight nor any theaytre." They were in the dark again but for the treacherous glimmer of the moon. "Do yer think yer could see to tie this to yon balk without a light?"

Beiley did not answer; unless may be his thoughts answered.

"There's not many would care to trust theirsens inside 'ere with me by night. How d'yer know as I ain't the ghost of Jack Caunt hissen?"

"I don't believe in ghosts."

"M'appen not, but yet yo're afeared on 'em."

He laughed again. His laugh was a horror; so fearful a mixture it was of mirth, malice and insanity. Beiley was glad to be again in the open. The moon had for the moment broken through and its slant beams extended their two shadows hideously, side by side, upon the darksome ground, and markedly drew out the halter in the man's hand with a dreadful elongation.

"Well, I moot trudge. Are yer coming my road or are yer stopping for the night?"

"Neither; I'm going on."

"Yer can't. The road goes no furder. Just as if 'twere made a purpose for Jack Caunt to come and hang hissen." The man again laughed his fearful laugh. "Jack Caunt and two or three others. Who knows? Who knows?"

They walked side by side; and it happened that the stranger so carried the halter that it was always next Beiley, to whom it whispered devilish suggestions. The moon now belonged entirely to the clouds; the way was crowded with shadows. They gained the hard road. There was no talk, not a word, except the secret communion of thought with thought; until after an un-

measured while Beiley was brought to a stand by the fellow's words:

"I moot now say good-night."

There was no appearance at that point of any road, lane or path turning off from the direct way, nor was there any habitation within view. Beiley put his hand to the halter.

"I'll give you half-a-crown for it," he said.

"What for?" said the man. "Do yer want to hang yoursen?"

And he laughed loud. Beiley made no answer; but he did not release his hold of the halter.

"All right; yer shall hae it; I'll never balk a man of his pleasure. Here, tae it. But upon condition as I hae it again when yo've done wee't. That's conveniencing both and hurting nayther. It's a strong un an' a long un, like Daddy Goode's boot-laces; yer needn't have no fear on't. It's none o' them undependable beggars as promises a broken neck and gies yer nubbut a broken shin."

The halter and the half-crown, Beiley's last piece of silver, Lady Sally's gift, changed hands.

"I'll come round for it i' th' morning. Y'ull be done wee't by then?"

"Yes."

"Good. I know the place. It's good stuff, remember; yer may trust yoursen to it without fear o' the consequences."

Beiley looked back upon the dark silent road, as though he were looking back upon the course, desolate, dispeopled, of an extinguished life. When he turned again the man was gone from his side. As for himself he no longer weighed and balanced; the material touch of the rope had transformed a suggestion, an impulse, into a resolution. He went back at a slow even pace. The end being so sure there was as little room for haste as for delay. When he came to a hard part of the road he heard the echo of his own footsteps behind him, and it seemed to him that the man was coming after him to

claim the reversion of the rope. At only one place he made a brief stoppage, and that was just before he entered the lane that led to the hovel, that led to the end.

He was taking his leave of life. He had come to the end of everything; there was no looking forward for want of an object, no looking back on a discarded past. He had ceased to expect from others; he had no dependence upon himself. The last thought that passed through his mind was in the form of a message. He would not have written it down even if writing materials had been within reach; would sooner have burnt his writing-hand to a stump than have written it; still he felt a momentary softening, felt the same shame, felt the same despair, as if it had been uttered into an ear or put visibly before an eye.

Then he turned into the lane. Forthwith his thoughts were a quarter of a mile in advance of his feet; and his eyes were with his thoughts. He passed under the trees, and the glimmer of star-light which had hitherto attended him was cut off. He stumbled into a rut and the jolt awoke him to his surroundings. His first bewildered thought was that he had done it and was already shut off in the outer darkness. But he had the halter yet in his hand. He looked up and the sky did not differ from the blackness about his feet. There was nothing to distinguish backwards from forwards. The very road had failed him. That halter ready noosed seemed to be the only assurance of things material. He felt as if a river flowed on either hand of him, black and bottomless; as if one step and he would plunge into it. He was appalled by it, he who had not shrunk from the deliberate torture of the rope. The buzz of the leaves overhead, even the tumult of his own thoughts took the guise of voices, voices like the flow of a flood, yet voices that shouted "Ho!" that cried, "What hath it profited?" that whispered, "You can't be saved unless you believe in something." The halter fell from his hands. He went down upon his knees that he might feel the solid ground under him.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE AWAKENING

MORNING dawned. He was lying along the ground, having fallen asleep through utter weariness of mind and body. It had been day two or three hours when he awoke, cold, stiff, perplexed. His first thought, that it was his wedding morning, was crossed by unshaped apprehensions. He started up and felt for his watch. There was no watch in his watch-pocket. How did he come to be sleeping out?

He was in that part of the lane which was most thickly roofed and walled in by interlacing boughs, so that daylight entered robbed of its common ostentations. He went forward in a new-awakened haste; but not far. He came to a twist in the way; the woods fell back; he saw the hovel in the clearing, he remembered; the public ignominy, the despair, the half-crown's worth of rope, the night on his knees. He turned back.

As he passed the place where he had spent the night he expected to see the halter on the ground, even looked for it, with something of horror. But it was not there. He understood that he was to live. He walked on out of the shady lane into the sunny road. He felt some degree of recovery from his hopelessness, felt the assurance of strength to endure life if not to enjoy it, to bear if not to do. The day was such a one as has both a threat and a promise in it. There were clouds, high and white and still, among which, through which, behind which the sun shone or glimmered or was hid; and between which were peeps of blue of every tint,

from the almost green, almost grey of the horizon to the altogether azure of the zenith.

After a while he crossed the verge of the woodlands and came to a village; one evidently much frequented by picnickers, sight-seers and trippers; by those who leave home in order to eat and drink or in order to see or in order to leave home. He bought a loaf there with his last penny, and then hastened away from the folk-encumbered neighbourhood of the houses and railway. He could hardly wait for that however before he attacked the bread with his fingers and teeth. It was more than twenty-four hours since he had eaten, and that a meagre dole of prison bread.

Then followed a day and a half of wandering with nothing to sustain his endurance but the remnant of that loaf and a turnip which he picked up on the road. Often and often he condemned, with a physical condemnation that for the time being overpowered the moral, the squandering of that half-crown upon mere rope. With that in his pocket he might have walked with a purpose in his mind, a destination in view. So he learnt that despair, when it is not the last defence, is the last offence. But he made or completed many other discoveries during those two days; he learnt from within what it is to be an outcast, to have no objective, to look on the ground, to sleep without a roof, to be hungry. Which hunger is the sum of all evils, an intolerable condition against which nature revolts. All our preaching and policing are nothing if they do not recognize that.

Unconsciously though it may have been, his wanderings ever had a southward direction. About noon of the second day he was passing through a large colliery village. He stopped at a cottage, one of a long row, to ask a man who sat in his shirt-sleeves by the door for a draught of water.

"Why, dal me, if it ain't t' counter-joomper!" exclaimed the man. "Dal me, if I should a knowed thee if 'tworn't for that cockney cock to thy gab!"

Beiley recognized him as Harry, the young miner with whom he had made the trip to Welham.

"Speak, mon, an' gie's a bit more o' th' cockney. I'm a married mon, counter-joomper! What dosta think to that? Missis! That's how 'tis I've flitted from Watford. Missis! here!"

A young woman came to the door, tall and fresh and smiling.

"This is my oad woman. What dosta think to 'er? Mrs. Spargoe, that's her neame while she changes it for a better. It's t' counter-joomper, Bina! the mon I've to'd thee about, as way chucked out at Welham. What dosta think to that?"

She shook hands with Lord Beiley and said:

"Hope you're well. Glad to see yer."

"But coom in, mon, coom in," said Harry; "let's see how thou looks sittin'."

He took Beiley by the hand and drew him indoors, partly by persuasion, partly by force. Beiley found himself in a little brick-floored living-room, clean and newly furnished. The table was ready spread for a meal with white tablecloth and shiny knives and forks.

"Way hanna bin married nubbut two month. Hey, mon, it's a grand loife! It's fun! it's foine! What's thy 'pinion o' the dresser? It didna coom whome till last Sat'day. We lay it to lick the hull row into fits."

"'Arry, 'Arry!" said Mrs. Spargoe. "Don't beller it so as 'Endersons can hear. There's been unpleasantness a'ready about the best bedstead."

"There's sartin to be unpleasantness if a mon 'll nayther faight nor be satisfeed."

"I'm glad he won't fight."

"An' his own woman screets at 'im, 'Square thy two fisses an' blacken 'is two boz oys for 'im, the mongrel!' It fair bates me as there should be sich a diff'rence o' 'pinion about sich a simple thing as faightin' or not faightin'. But how's taters cookin'? Thou mun hae a bite o' dinner wee's, counter-joomper."

Beiley was for excusing himself and hurriedly withdrawing.

"Nay," said the wife with simple heartiness, "I shan't let yer off; so that's all about it." She drew the best chair in the room to the table. "Come, sit and make yourself at 'ome."

He acknowledged the compulsion of her homely undemonstrative womanliness.

"Ay," said Harry, "sit i' th' missis's cheer; troy the cushions on't. Comfortable, ain't it? But, mon, listen to may. Dosta plee football as well as thou plees cricket?"

That was said so seriously as to imply that only then had young Harry the miner reached a topic which touched the fundamentally important. It was fitting therefore that Beiley, who had hitherto barely spoken a word, should open himself.

"I used to play a little," he said.

"One of our forrards is took badly wi' mezzles an' way canna fill his pleace satisfactory. Mezzles, mon! The very wake o' the fust match o' t' saison! Didsta iver hear o' sich mismanagement? Mezzles! Tha wouldna catch Harry Spargoe, full back, haein' mezzles at sich a fool of a time. Dosta plee forrard?"

"I did, but——"

"Ay, thou's joost the mek of a forrard; not mooch, but middlin' good. Missis! way've fun a plee-er i' Fosh Jarge's pleace! Mon, I loove thee as if thou were my own brother. Way canna pee thee wage, becos it's agen the rules, but way can pee thee expenses as mooch as thou loikes. It's Soccer thou plees of coorse?"

"No, Rugby; but I——"

"Well, thou mun do thy best; thou mun bust thysen, thou mun—Na, na," Harry turned to his wife for sympathy—"it wunna fit, Bina; no more nor thy foldidols on my broad back. The most yo can git out o' one o' them Rugby varmin is this; hay'll be so careful not to use his honds hay'll forgit to use his legs."

"Yer must ask Bert Foster," said Mrs. Spargoe. "Dinner's ready."

"I shall black-guard 'im afore hafe-toime."

"But yer mustn't be so 'ot-'eaded. I allus tell yer."

"Hot, wench? I'm no hotter nor a football plee-er should be. It's him as'll be so co'd; it's that as 'll be the beginnin' on't. But t' mate an' taters is hot anyhow. Draw up to table, counter-joomper. Dosta loike it fat or lane, or lane *and* fat? Gie'm plenty o' taters, Bina. Ax a blessin', so's hay can begin."

So Lord Beiley, made heartily welcome, ate and rested in the miner's cottage. Towards the end of the meal Harry burst out with:

"I'd ommost forgot. What dosta think, counter-joomper? They said thou was a lord, an' a scabby un at that. Sich gas! I says, says I, 'Lads, if the mon were a lord hay wouldna ha' run down his own koind as hay did. I've lived i' th' worruld, lads. No, hay'd a cracked up their kitchen cobbles for best broight. Besoides,' says I, 'the mon's a good mon,' I says; 'hay plees wi' a straight bat.' No, I know a good mon when I see one; I've bin a good mon mysen iver sin twenty-second o' July. I goo to chapel as often as t' missis taes[1] me, an' I stop prayer-meetin' as often as she mays[2] me. I holler amen at finish but niver ang-core. Lord love thee, th' oad women as is theer! I think they mun mek oad women at prayer-meetin', out'n oad men."

"'Arry, 'Arry, yer shouldn't talk like that!"

"I'm non talkin', missis; I'm listenin' to thee. Lord Bilbie, that were his neem. Bina, the woman canna a bin a good woman or shay wouldna a letten him goo. Thou wouldna a letten me, wouldst tha?"

"Not likely. If thou doesn't know what's good for thee I do. Besides the tea-cups was bought."

"Thou seest!" said Harry, turning to his guest. "But thou hasna done atin'; thou mun hae a plateful or two more yit."

[1] Takes. [2] Makes.

But their guest had done eating with a sudden failure of appetite, whatever Harry and his wife might say. Soon he thanked his friends for their hospitality and took his leave. Harry walked with him to the turn nominally to show him an unimportant short-cut, really in order to open the more freely his expansive young heart.

"What dosta think to 'er, counter-joomper? Canna she cook?"

"Capitally," said Beiley.

"Doesna shay seem to make the house shoine loike?"

"She does indeed."

"Ain't oi the luckiest chap i' th' pleace?"

"I think you are; I congratulate you; I hope you'll continue to be such. You will if you suffer your headstrong disposition to be restrained by her good sense."

"Restreened? Mon, listen to may. The dee after to-morrer's the fust match o' t' saison, an' oi'm a-gooin' to ax Foster's Bert to plee left wing joost becos his sister Greece goos to t' same boible class as hersen. What more dosta want? Look! Thou mun foller this path by t' soide o' t' tram-wee. Thou canna mistek it. Goodbye. Here, stop!" The Derbyshire lad's loud volubility had suddenly put on a shamefaced stammer. "Oi'm afreed—that is Bina thinks—— Here! dal speechifyin'! catch ho'd." He had silver in his hand which he awkwardly tried to transfer to Lord Beiley's. "Trade's better. Way can spare it. Thou'rt welcome. The dresser's peed for."

"Thank you, it is quite unnecessary; I have all I need."

"For sartain? I tho't—Bina said—— Thou wunna? Well, shak honds, counter-joomper. Good-bye. Be sure an' gie's a look-in when thou'rt this wee agen."

The sun was getting low when Beiley lay down worn out under a young oak on a wayside bank in a quiet leafy lane. If he had opened his eyes he could have seen about a mile off in the same quarter as the sun a colliery chimney spouting smoke. But if he opened his

eyes it was only intermittently, momentarily, inattentively, for he was between wakefulness and lethargy, and nearer to the latter. In such a state the ears are more alert than the eyes by far, and it was by his ears that he was first aware of some sort of woman who came up at a jog-trot, neither walk nor run; a poor forlorn creature with a drooping head that was never still, large vacant eyes that were never fixed, gaping mouth that was always a-twitch, lean clawed hands ever at work. He saw too, yet hardly saw, that she was dressed in a soiled print hood and a ragged black gown that trailed the dust, and she carried on her arm an old manilla bag. She stopped opposite to him to pick a blackberry or two from the hedge, but before she had dropped them into her bag the lids closed again over his negligent eyes, and he straightway forgot her.

Again it was his ears that did sentry-go for his eyes. When next they opened it was twilight. He heard again the uncouth cry that had roused him; again and again, near at hand, sounds between the human and the bestial, inarticulate but expressive, of anger and especially of fear. They brought him to his feet sooner perhaps than an appeal in King's English would have done. He ran, and as soon as he had mounted a blob made in the road by a canal bridge saw what was agate. The poor creature who had last gone by was surrounded by three lusty vagabonds. One had snatched her bag from her and was looking into it; another was ransacking her pocket; the third, a big burly rascal, was threatening her with tongue and fist. Her hood had been pulled down on her neck, which disclosed her poor head, all bald but for a pitiful grey fringe at the nape.

"See this 'ere? I'll dab it in yer ugly mug if yer don't shut up."

"Noat but bloomin' blackberries," said the first.

"Where do you keep yer money?" said the second, and tried to force open one of her hands which she kept clenched.

"A crazy Liza like yersen," said the third, "might

do wuss nor come along wi' three chaps like uz. We'd put yer up to all the fetches and y'ud mek a livin' where we clam; y'ud live like a lady."

Still she screeched and withheld her hand and tried to recover her bag.

"Tek that then," said the third, "if yer wain't be said," and smote her over the mouth.

Whereupon Lord Beiley came up.

"You beast!" he said to the third. "Take your hands off," he said to the second. "Give her back the bag," he said to the first.

He spoke not above the ordinary pitch and with perfect balance. It was long since he had felt such self-mastery. The quiet and the twilight seemed to side with him, making the sound more considerable, the self-assurance more assured. The two nearer ruffians drew back, the other returned the bag and essayed an apology.

"'Twere on'y a bit of a lark we was 'avin' with the oad geyser, master."

"Your notion of a lark is brutal."

He turned to the woman.

"Which way are you going?"

She seemed to understand though nothing came from her mouth but voluble gibberish. She returned up the lane, Beiley walking by her side. He looked inconsiderable seen from the back, and the courage of the biggest ruffian came again.

"What flats we are to be gammoned by a little bloke like 'im!" he said. "I could lay 'im out with one 'and."

He and his comrades started in pursuit.

"I wunnered," said the smallest of them, "as yo stood 'is bloomin' cheek, Belk."

"I was leavin' the little bit of offal to yersen, Wag."

Beiley perceived that they were being followed.

"Can I trouble you to run on," he said, "while I talk to these men? There's something I'd forgotten."

The poor creature only gibbered in answer, but as

though understanding the words or the accompanying gesture moved on and more quickly, while he waited. His lassitude had fallen from him; he felt as though he had but just eaten and drunk; he was braced up, almost exhilarated. The vagrants soon made up the short start which he had of them, and were evidently prepared for mischief. He was glad of it; the woman was already out of sight and presumably in safety. The smallest and lightest of the three came first; fired a charge of obscenity at short range, but seemed to lose courage as soon as he was within striking distance, and went down almost willingly to Beiley's right-hander. The latter however had laid himself open to the big Belk, who was but just behind and got in one that loosened his teeth and filled his mouth with blood. His own lunge fell short and before he could recover, he received a second between his eyes that laid him flat on his back.

"Kick him, Smut!" cried Belk. "Kick his ribs in!"

The third villain came round and kicked. But the kick instead of settling him seemed to help him up; he was on his legs again in an instant, closed up Smut's right eye with a straight one and then went for Belk's body; but that long-armed fellow's more effective counter again felled him.

"Kick his bloomin' brains out!" said Belk.

Smut however could not get near before Beiley was again on his legs and showing fight.

Belk was puzzled, partly intimidated by his antagonist's pertinacity; gave ground a yard or two and let him get home twice, under his chin and over his cheek-bone, before he replied.

"Yo bain't afeared on 'im, be yer?" said Wag from behind.

"No, but yo be, or y'ud get behint 'im an' gie 'im what-for."

The next exchanges were rather in favour of the lighter man; but Smut sneaking behind kicked him on the ham. Belk, seizing the moment of discomfiture, struck

him savagely over the mouth, knocked out a tooth that was loose and once more laid him all his length. Smut's kick, meant for his head, only grazed his ear and bruised his shoulder. He was up again immediately. To Belk there was something devilish, especially at dusk, in a courage that was charmed against defeat; and while he was hesitating to come on again the woman, who had returned unperceived, suddenly rushed upon them out of the gloom with a fierce wordless outcry. Wag and Smut took forthwith to their heels. Belk finding himself left did not wait to be attacked, but turned and strode after them. In good time, for next moment Beiley's legs gave way and he fell to the ground all of a heap.

The woman followed dog-like at the heels of the three for some distance, yapping inarticulate anger and threat. Then like a she-animal who has chased danger from her young she ran back, bent over her deliverer, took his hand, made noises of distress, pity, tenderness. But finding that he did not rise or open his eyes or show any sign of life, she put her arms about him under the shoulders, and lifting the upper part of his body—she was stronger than she looked—while his legs dragged, drew him to one side of the lane. But she was not content with that; evidently from her looking down the road so anxiously she feared the return of her persecutors; in three several violent efforts she hauled him to a gap in the fence, through it and down a steep bank to the canal side. Then after a brief rest, with a final panting struggle she pulled him under the bridge. There she tended him with an uninstructed kindness, stroked his hands and pale cheeks, made her harsh voice take the very coo of tenderness, went again and again to the bridge foot to spy if there were passers friendly or hostile.

After a while at the rumble of a long mineral train passing close at hand he awoke out of his swoon into a confused reality and sat up. Whereat the woman clapped her hands and uttered a loud dissonant laugh.

The sound roused his memory; he remembered the beginnings of the fight, but did not understand how he came to be there in the dark. He sat in a strip of darkness, but on either hand of it was the glimmer of something. It took time for him to make out that it was moonlit water; which however did not leave his surprise the less. The woman after much unintelligible vociferation took his hand as in leave-taking, and went off up the lane at that quick pace of hers which was neither walk nor run.

He rose, but not immediately, and walked unsteadily from under the bridge. There he took in the situation; a short section of canal in a shallow cutting, overshadowed on both sides by the trees of a plantation and closed in at the ends by an iron railway viaduct and the low-arched road bridge. But the dark glimmering water made him shudder; he felt for the moment as if he still had the rope in his hand, he suffered a return of the faintness. He went back to the shelter of the bridge and sat with his back against its wall. He had nothing to do but watch the slow approach of the moonlight to the place where he sat and listen to the frequent plop of the fish.

After what seemed a long while the woman returned. As she knelt before him in the moonlight he could see that she held a bottle, which she put to his lips with a mumble, probably of invitation. He needed little of that; he drank eagerly and drained the bottle of its contents, milk, tea, coffee or village water; he did not seek to be assured which. She took the bottle back and held it up to the light, and when she saw it was empty she laughed her harsh guttural laugh.

What a night that was that ensued! There was neither sound sleep in it nor clear waking, but a jumble of the two without the restfulness either of rest or of certainty. All he could say was, it seemed to him and it did not seem to him. And the seeming and the not-seeming lasted the night through without a break; or else there was break and break innumerable with im-

mediate momentary rejoining of continuity. Nothing was ever unquestionably before him, and yet he never quite lapsed into unconsciousness. It seemed to him, yet hardly through his senses, that the woman was always there, was always crouching in the dark with her eyes round-open upon him, she seeing him, he not seeing her. It seemed to him that trains were ever passing along the adjacent railway, swift passenger trains and heavy goods, coming up with a tumultuous onset that seemed aimed at him, but just missing him steamed furiously by. It seemed to him that the moon was ever encroaching upon the shadow wherein he sat, until its shine touched his feet, his legs, the lower part of his body. But when it had risen as high as his waist, it seemed to him and not seemed that it began to decline until even his feet were again in the deep shade, and the shimmer of the black water was so faint that possibly his perception of it was mere memory of what had been. It seemed to him that he could uninterruptedly feel the chilly damp of the bridge wall to his back, and hear the fish at their watery gambols. And yet how could those seemings be without an equal quantity of not-seeming? For all the while, apparently without intermission, he was a child at his play, he was a youth at his schooling, he was a man at his folly; all the while he was tossing on the sea, was hurrying over the land, was never anywhere so long that he could be sure of it; all the while he was doing, undoing, not doing; was present throughout at a certain wedding that had never taken place, and was at the same time shamefully absent from it; was playing the mountebank on the sea-sands, the listless legislator at Westminster, the cadger on the Carrs, the unprofitable "employer of labour," the idle and disorderly person at Sopworth, the common but uncharged idler at his club, the thriftless bargainer for a half-crown's worth of rope. All the while he was seeing Lady Sally, all the while he had seen her and would never see her again. And thereto a sense of bodily discomfort was continually with him and not with him, from the

uneasiness of his position, from his bruised mouth, his throbbing head and aching limbs.

That being so and not being so, how came it that not by degrees but all at once he was aware of a flood of daylight round and about, which made the shadow of the bridge a vain thing? The woman too was gone and he had not seen her go. He rose stiffly and limped from under the bridge.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE WEDDING MARCH

THE sun was in the act of rising. He came up like a conqueror, resplendent, immediately predominant. The heavens were his forthwith, his the hedged fields, both the green and the yellow, his the crowded woods and solitary hills. The only exception to the complete surrender was in the timid hesitation of the thin mists that cowered in the hollows and diaphanously veiled the still water, and of this pale denial he made a glory for himself. It would seem as if some of that penetrative sunshine had got within Lord Beiley. He still felt sore and stiff, he had not a penny in his pocket, but he was no longer altogether downcast. He went up on the bridge. A collier was passing and he could exchange a frank and equal good-morning with him. His mind seemed cleared of some of the vile stuff that had clogged it; the cowardice, the indecision, the self-consciousness. What had hitherto been but a blind impulse became a purpose. He had a hunting-box in the Pytchley country, fifteen miles on the other side of Leicester, within a long day's walk. He would go thither. The collier was already out of call or he would have asked him the way.

He had stood but a very little while hesitating between his right hand and his left, when the woman whom he had rescued the night before appeared up the lane with her manilla bag still upon her arm. She expressed pleasure at seeing him by the only means at her disposal, the loud harsh laugh and the wooden gesture. She signed to him to sit in the sun; but almost

immediately she seized his hand, apparently taken with a sudden fear of her assailants' reappearance, and was not satisfied until he had let himself be drawn down to their hiding-place under the bridge. She seated him as before upon the ground and she clapped her hands twice in token of content; then handed to him the contents of her bag, a bottle of skim milk and three or four thick slices of bread and dripping.

"But you've left yourself none," he said, and attempted to give part back.

She refused volubly, almost angrily, and when he persisted withdrew round the bridge out of sight. Presently she peered round the corner, and when she saw the food still untouched scolded him roundly in her gibberish. He answered by holding out a piece of the bread to her. She hid herself again, again peeped and again scolded, but perhaps less forcibly; even came a little nearer at his beck, a little and a little nearer; until he could lay the slice upon her hand. The touch of it broke the remains of her resistance. She did indeed sign to her guest to begin first, but after that she ate with an eagerness that spoke of an unblunted appetite.

How delicious to the peer was that bread and dripping which he shared with the idiot woman, and especially how delicious that skim milk which they drank out of the bottle hobnob! He threw crumbs to the fish, who snapped at them greedily and gave thanks with a switch of the tail. The woman fed them in imitation and laughed at the sport they made her. Except the eddies which their movements caused, the only sign of current in the quiet water was the slow drift of a tangle of some green weed. A furlong off on the side opposite to the railway viaduct a slight twist in the canal made the trees on each hand seem to meet over it in an arch, and there already stood a fisherman like a statue with his eyes upon his float. But the scanty meal was soon ended, and Beiley deemed it necessary to get quickly upon the road. He made such expressions of thanks and farewell as he thought she would understand, and

went forth into the lane; but she followed him and made strong, even vehement opposition to his going the way that he had chosen. She frowned and shook her head and held him by the sleeve with an outpouring of her customary jargon. In the end, since his choice was based upon nothing more definite than a general sense of direction under the sun's guidance, he thought good to let her have her will. Probably she would lead him where he could make inquiries, and set out for Leicester without losing time by a false start. Her delight at the concession was unmistakable.

Half a mile on the lane crossed a highway, down which she turned, and he beside her. Before them were the two tall chimneys of a colliery, and half hidden in foliage the scattered houses of a village, the slim spire of a church. Soon they came where the canal went under the road. Close by along its banks was the colliery. Some two score of the pit-hands with coal-blackened faces were loafing or larking about, youths, hobbledehoys, mature men, mostly with pipes in their mouths. As Beiley and the idiot woman passed they were greeted with the insult of a general laughter and with many a loud uncomplimentary remark from the younger bystanders.

"Hello! here's oad Tally! She's gotten a sweet-'eart!"

"Where didsta pick that sod up, Tally?"

"I don't think much to him, Tally. Yo'd a done a sight better if yo'd a took me."

"Or me!"

"Or me!"

"He's stole a chap's coat or yer wouldn't a knowed 'im for a man at all."

"Yo want to hae a stun o' taller gi'en in wee'm for mek-weight."

Some of their jokes and sarcasms were far from delicate, but their only effect was to cause the object of them to draw closer to Lord Beiley; which was duly commented on.

"How they do cotton to one another for sure!"

"I wish my gell ud squeedge up as close."

"Lord, what a mug she's gied 'im wi' kissin' on 'im! Strike me if she hain't drored one of his teeth!"

But they were not content with making the pair run the gauntlet of their incivilities; the younger half of the assemblage followed them down the road.

"Yer mun get married soon, dears, or y'ull bust out afire."

"Yer fat's all of a frizzle a'ready."

Just then the church bells sounded the prolonged chime of the hour.

"Hark! them's the chutch bells. I do b'lieve as they're gooin' to be married to-day, the fause beggars!"

"That accounts for Tally haein' 'er Sunday bonnet on."

"An' the man them two nobby black eyes."

"Why didna thou send an' invite uz, Tally? 'Twain't jonnock."

"We'll goo 'owsumdever. Form in percession, lads."

"Me an' Tushy ull goo fust as chief mourners."

"Wheer am I to be?"

"Yo can gie 'er away. 'Cos yo've noat else to gie."

Jostling one another, pressing upon the two, shouting, laughing, hooting, singing, they formed themselves into a rough procession behind; in which they were joined by all the children and what idle stragglers there were on the road. Some picked up old kettles and tin canisters from the hedge bottoms, and with sticks and stones made thereon music appropriate to the occasion. So they passed through the village. The women stood at their doors or came down to their garden gates. Said one to another with ready-made laughter:

"I never seed a better!"

"Tally an' 'im meks a good pair."

"See our George wee's coat inside out!"

"Taylor's 'Arry's gotten your Letty's 'at on."

"Don't be so rough wee't, 'Arry, yo young hound!"

"Charley's letten 'is jacket down to 'is 'eels like a petticut."

"What a ran-tan to be sure!"

"Glad it een't my weddin' mornin', Mrs. Towle."

"Who's the bridegroom?"

"Oh, some travellin' chap by's looks."

"It fair gies me the cramp i' my sides wi' laughin'."

"I've laughed while it aches back o' my ears."

"I know I heerd my stay-lace cry rip."

"Shall's foller 'em a bit an' see the fun out?"

"I don't mind if I do. Th'ouse mun look after itsen."

"Is't a real weddin', think yer, or just a bit of a gam?"

"Blessed if I know."

"It moot be for the bells are ringin' for't."

"I don't 'ear no bells."

"No, becos they've stopped."

"If they hae the bells for sich as them, I wain't hae 'em for our Ann Alice."

"I reckon Mester Welbourne will a paid for 'em hissen. 'E believes in treatin' all on uz alike. We're all on 's children o' one God, as don't suffer no distinction 'cept atween gentry an' common folk."

"He's a kind sort, is Mester Welbourne."

"With a bit o' humourin'."

"It's his raight to be humoured."

"But it's not his raight to send to Nottingham for his meat."

"Of course, Mrs. Mundy, if I were a butcher or mother-in-law to a butcher it ud be diff'rent."

"What are they stoppin' for?"

"I can't see."

It was this, that as they approached the church gates Beiley suddenly awoke to his whereabouts. That church before him was the church in which he would have been married, if his promise had been endorsed by performance. That park wall on the other side of the road enclosed the ancestral domain of Lady Sally Sallis, may-

be at that very moment enclosed her. His vision was so effectually cleared that it took in the smallest detail of known things, the prim police-station, the leafy avenue to the rectory, the quaint inn, the pump set in a little square. He remembered perfectly that apple-faced girl standing at a rose-wreathed door, as she stood when he rode through with Lady Sally. But the roses were withered. He stopped, disconcerted, confounded. The brilliant wedding assemblage might still have been in yonder building with their eyes upon the door, and he without, unwashed, unapparelled, unprepared. His mind was filled with the incongruities of a nightmare, even while the sun shone discouraging dream-figments and real flesh and blood in real boots was treading upon his heels.

The mob, which had grudged his former at least well-assumed indifference to their mockery, was delighted with his sudden stoppage, his manifest disturbance. They pressed close around with renewed clamour and exaggerated expostulation. The greater part of them had already been persuaded by the cry of their own voices that there really was a wedding to the fore.

"Nay, nay, surry! yo should a tho't o' that afore yo comed to the chutch gates."

"Well, I've seed a many as wished theirsens the furder the nearer they got to the parson's book, but I never seed one as looked so willin' to let well alone."

"Ho'd 'im to it, Tally."

"Then she mun ho'd 'im by the scuft o' th' neck."

For Beiley had begun to draw back. The mob, hooting and caterwauling, impeded his retreat if they did not actually oppose it. Tally seemed to be trying to urge him forwards, but her gestures were as dumb to him as the utterances of her mouth.

"Say the word, Tally——"

"Shay canna do that."

"Tip uz the wink, Tally, an' we'll egg 'im into chutch with our knees."

"Ay, lass, an' ho'd 'im upsoide down an' shake the

'Oi will's' out 'n 'im on to t' floor if they wunna coom out o' theirsens."

"Here's the parson, Tally! Yo moan't mek a spill on't so near the lip."

The clergyman had indeed come to the rectory gates, wondering what the hubbub meant.

"What's 'e got 'is 'and up for? What's 'e sayin'?"

"Dalled if I know."

"Prayin' for fine weather mebbe for the cricket match."

The momentary diversion of the crowd's eyes and interest allowed Beiley to get through to the lane, whose enlarged mouth made that open space for the pump. Tally was still by him, gabbling expostulation, entreaty, almost it would appear threat; but the finger that pointed was not towards the church but the park walls and the tall overhanging oaks. The mob's attention quickly returned to him and her. They were angry that their playthings had so nearly escaped them, and the play but half over. They boohed and hooted and whistled; amid which two or three stones were thrown and one hit Beiley on the back. He turned to them. His white composed face gained him some sort of hearing.

"If you wish to throw at me," he said, very distinctly without at all forcing his voice, "I'll stand on one side. Then you won't be afraid of hitting the lady."

He stood aside; but there was nobody to throw. The boldness of the offer shamed them, the high-bred style of it, so incongruous with such an exterior, astonished them. What with the shame and the astonishment there was silence. If a few of those behind pushed forward in order to see, some of those in front drew back to get out of sight; there was no more movement than that. It was plain there was to be no more either of violence, pursuit or insult. Beiley turned and walked away; Tally followed him, but ceased from her gesticulatory remonstrance, as though the unexpectedness of the issue preoccupied her brain. Very soon their vexers were out of sight, the last house was passed. They

walked on until the lane changed to footpath, the footpath to hard road. Unconsciously he had again given up the direction to his companion.

They came to a spot in the road where she twitched his sleeve and enforced his attention. Following the pointing of her finger he saw at a distance the white conspicuous towers of Sheraton in their green setting. He looked long. When his eyes returned from their looking, he perceived that the woman's gaze was fixed upon him with something in it nearer intelligence than he had remarked before. Could it be possible that she recognized him? He shook his head, whether in answer to his own thoughts or that look of hers. He perceived that the sun was behind him, he turned back down the road. Tally made no outcry; the hand that pointed dropped disappointed to her side; she let herself be led away. Only a few yards and the white towers were no longer visible amid the green.

Presently they passed whereby is a noticeable landmark in that smooth green country, an upstanding crag of red stone on a grassy hillock's side, bearing some resemblance to an old churl's head, double-chinned, grim-mouthed, knob-nosed, fantastically hatted with a great flat slab. Beiley remembered its being pointed out to him by Lady Sally once when they rode that way together, his then vivid recollection being in strong contrast to his former slack attention. Half a mile further they came within near sight of a village, and then Tally ceased to follow. Beiley turned to know the reason. She outstretched her arm in the direction of Sheraton. Her eyes and the mute gesture pleaded with him, but again he shook his head. She seemed to understand sufficiently. She seized his nearer hand, and before he knew what she would be at had kissed it vehemently; then she took something from her pocket, thrust it between his palm and his fingers and fled at a remarkable speed for one of her figure. It was a penny that she had put into his hand. He let it lie on his palm; he did not pursue her and in half a minute she had run out of sight.

He continued walking briskly in the same direction as before, which was as nearly southward as he could hit it, through the just-mentioned village, up-hill and down-hill into another village and a wide valley. Many were the tall chimneys both to right and to left, indicative of populous places on either hand, but turning neither way he kept straight on. The road he was following dwindled to a lane, and the lane to a footpath. He accosted a man who was stepping towards the railway station which he had just passed, a respectable well-dressed buttoned-up sort of person.

"I want the nearest way to Leicester. Can you assist me?"

"That depends," answered the respectable person, "on what kind of assistance you require."

He felt the bottom button of his coat, if by some chance it were undone.

"To be directed the best way."

"The best way would be to go by train. The station is at hand."

"I wish to go by road if you please."

"In that case, as you are here, you cannot do better than cross the—than keep on to Marston. The road thence through Loughborough is fairly direct."

Beiley went on as directed, by the footpath which led past an ancient farmhouse into level meadows. The respectable person had mentioned all that, but abstained from mentioning the river through fear of being asked to contribute to the penny for the ferry. Beiley saw the glory before he saw the river. For opposite to him the mid-stream was flowing swiftly over a shallow gravelly bed, and a fresh breeze, which he had not been conscious of before, was blowing upwards and breaking it into myriads of wavelets, each of which wore a jewel on its head, the gift of the sun. Moreover there were masses of weed which floated on the surface, yellow, brown and green, plentifully begemmed with points of reflected light; or but just submerged they lay adrift like the loose tresses of a water nymph, all green, a

manifold green that mysteriously changed as the ripples overpassed into greens that glistened and greens that melted away into the lucent greys, violets and purples of the surrounding waters, or into the opaque browns and drabs of the shingly bottom.

Beneath the bank whereon he stood the river flowed darkly and strongly; but down-stream a bushy islet divided its course; producing a backwater and giving partial shelter from the breeze, whence arose a certain confusion of currents and contrast of gleam and gloom which gave the whole an appearance of extraordinary animation. To and fro swallows, martins and screaming swifts darted incessantly, and a pair of yellow-breasted wagtails fluttered delicately from point to point where the emergent weeds gave footing. He was surprised into admiration.

There being no one within sight of whom to make inquiries but a boatman pulling from the opposite side, he sat down to await his arrival, and was immediately seized by a drowsiness so heavy, that the boatman had to bawl into his ear before he answered whether or no he wished to cross by the ferry.

"I wish to go to Leicester," said he.

"Then yer do want to go by the ferry," said the boatman. "Hurry up."

"How much is it?"

"A penny."

Beiley, roused and but half roused, walked down the bank and stumblingly took his seat in the boat.

"Yo've bin haein' a sup," said the ferryman.

As he put off he continued, "I might a said more nor a sup, but it's allus safest to be o' the small side. I can do aythe with or without, mysen. A man as can't do without I call him a hog, and a man as does do without I call him a fool. There's a teetotaler in our village, a reg'lar hot-watter un. I could faight 'im any day o' th' week an' knock 'im into the next day but one. I could faight 'im to-day, Friday, an' knock 'im clean into Monday. Friday, Sat'day—into Sunday, I mean.

Knock 'im clean into Sunday mornin', just i' time for church or a late breakfast accordin' to his fancy."

But the words went by the hearer's ears as the swift waters went before his eyes, giving him a bare sense of movement, none of a meaning. He woke up however from his lethargy as he stumbled out of the boat on to the gravel. He took from his pocket the penny that Tally had given him. It seemed to him that it had but just been slipped into his palm. He looked across the river as thinking to see her speeding away from him.

"Yo seem very choice o' that penny, mester," said the ferryman.

"Yes, but it's the only one I have upon me."

"No matter for that; pay me next time yer come this way."

"That may be never."

"Balm! Never's a date as no business man teks no orders for. Yer wouldn't 'ardly get a sportin' chap to ventur a bet on't. There een't no day i' th' week as is named after it. I allus faight shoy o' them tinety little words as teks so much on theirsens. They slip out so easy among the big common words as means noat partic'lar, like a hafe-sovereign in a drizzle o' coppers. Mornin' to yer."

The ferryman had already been hailed from the farther side. Three strong pulls of the left arm and one of the right, and there were already twenty yards of water between him and his fare.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CLOCKIN'-TIME

BEILEY walked no further than from the gravel to the grass. He sat down, lay down, and no sooner did his body feel the support and comfort of the warm soft bank than he fell fast asleep. He was waked about two hours after noon by a purple-faced perspiring busybody, who shook him by the shoulders until he sat up, and then shouted in his bewildered ear:

"I thought p'raps you didn't know you was asleep. The sun's hot and your 'at's fell off."

He rose automatically, and without a word of thanks, unthanks or argument turned and went towards the neighbouring village. Gradually his unconscious going became conscious; in which change pain was the chief agent. It was not so much the overpowering heat and glare of the sun that beat upon his head and flashed directly in his eyes, nor yet the inconvenience of the dust, the foot-weariness or the debility of hunger, as a long-hoarded consuming thirst which made his dry tongue seem to bulk larger than all the rest of his body. He stopped at a cottage to inquire the way, and while the housewife and her daughter discussed the advantage of an obscure footpath, which rightly followed would take off half a mile but diverged from would put on a mile, he drank so copiously of water that for the moment his appetite seemed quenched; but within ten minutes it was back upon him again as furious as ever. Having passed through the village he again begged a draught of water at a farmhouse by the road-side. The

farmer's wife gave him instead a mug of milk with the explanation that their water was nothing to crack of.

"It's as cheap sitting as standing," she said and pointed to a bench under the kitchen window.

From the back door the stackyard was fully visible. It contained several completed stacks and one of wheat but half-built. The waggon that was drawn up beside it was empty and stackers and teemer had gone away. Presumably they were taking their afternoon refreshment in the house, whence a rumble of voices came intermittently. The housewife, a clear-skinned quick-eyed woman in spite of her grey hairs and some fifty-five years, went in and was busy about her household chores; nevertheless her noticing eyes took the travel-stained wayfarer in as he sat in front of the window and drank the milk, not with loud animal gulps like an ordinary tramp but with the restraint of a gentleman in a lady's company. Presently he came to the door with his best thanks and the empty mug.

"Will yer have another sup?" asked the woman.

"I mustn't encroach upon your kindness."

"Yer should do like the nessbubs;[1] they never lose a good chance for want of an open gawp."

She went in and quickly returned with the mug re-filled.

"Here, take and drink."

"If I can do something for you in return."

"I don't know as yer can't." She looked him keenly over with her practical eyes. "It's afternoon clockin'-time and the men's teas want carrying to the field. The boy who should have took it on the empty waggon hasn't come yet, the servant-lass has gone to see her mother who's ill, and my daughter who might take it won't. That's the whole pedigree."

"I'll take it with pleasure."

After due preparation she brought out a big can of hot tea and a large two-lidded basket stuffed with sliced bread and butter and chunks of coarse currant-cake.

[1] Nestlings.

"Here, take this maund on your arm," she said, "and the tea in your tother hand, and come out into the road and I'll direct yer. Look! yer must turn to yer right at the cross-roads and go up-hill; then count four gates on the left 'and, four, and at the fourth yer must go in; then it's only one field off. Barton is carrying too, but it's not Barton's yer want, it's Pullen's. But there, the master'll holler as soon as he sees yer."

Can and basket were no light burden to one in Beiley's ill-fed unrested condition, but it was in his thought that the farmer's wife was still at the gate watching his progress. She had in fact gone in as soon as his back was turned, but the contrary impression so stiffened his curved spine and yielding limbs, that he was enabled to keep on without changing hands until he reached the cross-roads; not until he was within the fourth gate did he stand to take breath and wipe the blinding sweat out of his eyes. While he stood a laden waggon was drawn across the close by a fidgety mare all of a lather.

"Is that for Pullen's?" said the boy who led it.

"Yes."

"I should a bin there sooner, but this swine of a mare backed into a ditch an' nearly killed me an' another man."

The mare would not wait for more; she went hotly through the gate making a very fine miss of the post. When Beiley was half through the close, before he had time to doubt between Barton's and Pullen's, he heard a loud prolonged holloa which drew him to the right diagonally across field. As he advanced the holloas became louder and more frequent; and could presently be divided into words.

"Be sharp! Is this for huz? Come on with yer! Why are yer so late? Come sharply on! Why didn't Vitie bring it? But I know! I know! Leg it, man! We're sorely in need of a sup o' summat! Put some expression into yer feet! Who are yer? I don't seem to know yer. Sluther along! Are yer a Doddingham man? Yer come forrard so slow yer seem further off

every step! Come, come! It must be four o'clock now, and it'll be midnight afore you're here. Did the missis say if Robert had been? Come, come! a young man ought to be limberer!"

By then Beiley had crossed the first field and through a gap in the hedge had entered the second, in which harvesting operations were going on, a long narrowish enclosure on the ridge of the hill.

"It een't no man o' ourn," piped a boy's shrill voice in manifest disappointment.

The same voice as before, an astonishingly loud clear full and far-carrying voice, bawled back: "It's our basket and our can howsumever. That'll serve! Bring 'em across."

Beiley now perceived mistily through the drizzle of sweat from his forehead, that the voice belonged to a white-haired man who stood in the waggon, buried almost to his broad shoulders in the up-piled sheaves of wheat.

"Just these two tinety ends of rows and then it'll do!" he shouted; and ever as he shouted he was receiving and arranging the sheaves, which the pitchers on either side of the waggon delivered to him with their long forks.

As Beiley came within something like easy speaking-distance the farmer said:

"Why didn't yer answer me, man—all those remarks I made?"

"I thought they were merely rhetorical questions."

"Hey? What did the man say?"

"'E said," answered a pitcher, "'e tho't they was rotten questions."

"Nay, man, nay! A rotten question's such a one as provokes an evil answer; now mine didn't provoke any answer, either good or bad."

"I said 'rhetorical.'"

"Hey? Parabolical? That's a big word on an empty stomach. Up with the rope, Joe!"

The last sheaf had been lifted; the load was securely

roped; the loader slid to the ground; with heavy-handed stolidity the three pitchers stuck their forks in the hard hot ground; the boy left the horse's head. Beiley having set his burden down was moving off. In reply to his passing good-day the farmer said:

"But you'll stop and have a snack with us before yer go."

"I've just had two glasses of milk at the house."

"Then you'll be wanting the tea and sugar to it. And you've earned them."

The farmer sat in the shadow of the waggon with a sheaf for a cushion and his broad back to one of the wheels. He pulled the basket to him, bared his head for a moment and said:

"Lord's name be praised, Jesus Christ's sake, Amen. We'll present a lenthier thanksgiving, not a heartier, at half-time."

With rough and ready rapidity he served to each man a mug of tea and a slice of bread and butter. The others sat about on the stubble within easy reach, all but a sleek little middle-aged black-haired short-limbed blinking man whom they called Mouldiwarp or the Mole.

"Coom an' sit again me, Mouldiwarp," said the tallest of the pitchers.

"Not he," said the third, a red-haired fair-skinned man; "he's fun out a patent road of eatin' an' he's afeared o' huz 'fringin' on't."

Mouldiwarp without answering took his portion and sat apart behind one of the stowks.

"Well, men," said the farmer, "we've a deal to be thankful for. We ought to humble ourselves when we compare our privileges with our deserts. I can feel those pestering little pissimires [1] all up my legs a'ready. Another tot of tea and a bite more bread and butter? I don't know yer name. How did the missis happen on yer?"

[1] Ants.

"I had called in passing to beg a drink of water," said Beiley.

"What are yer sniggering at, Tom Morley?" said the farmer.

"Becos," answered the boy, "the man meks all 'is wuds so small loike."

"Do yer set yerself up, Tom Morley, to be the standard of pronounciation for the hull country?"

"I dunno."

"Set it down; there's something yer don't know. And with that set down this: When yer laugh at a feller-man you're laughing mainly at yerself."

"Some more to drink, please," said Tom Morley.

The farmer again removed his hat.

"Lord," he said, "Thy name be praised for what we've had and what we're going to have. The bread and butter and cake's good, the tea's particular good. I'm still insufficiently ashamed of my fleshly impatience to be drinking and grubbing; do Thou, Lord, transform it into a spiritual hunger and thirst for the bread of heaven and the water of life, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

Sweet to Lord Beiley was that coarse home-made bread and weak luke-warm tea. Sweet and straw-scented was the air of that dining-hall, wide were its walls, flawless its azure ceiling; golden gleamed the stubble that carpeted its floor. Fair were the wood-crowned hills on the horizon with here and there a village and up-pointing spire; fair were the rich green meadows between.

"Barton's ull be done a long chalk afore huz," said the red-haired pitcher.

"Good reason too," said the farmer; "they've a sight more help. Well, I offered Jacob Foster the same as you're addling yourselves, but he preferred six-pennorth of beer to ninepennorth of money."

"'E says," quoth another of the pitchers, the tall one, "as Mester Barton's beer an' damns meks a stronger mixtur nor your tea an' texes, 'e says."

"Yon's a hawk," said Tom Morley.

Beiley's eyes slowly followed the direction of the boy's finger up into the blue; in the midst of which as it seemed the bird hung on motionless wings. His eyes found the bird and the next moment were closed in sleep.

He awoke when the waggon began to move. Mr. Pullen was standing over him, and saying:

"Do yer want a job of work?"

"I beg your pardon."

"I to'd yer, mester," said the red-haired pitcher. "'Beg yer pardon' allus cooms first an' then 'Beg yer penny.'"

"Hold yer tongue, Joe; yer don't understand the man's language. That's the high way of saying, 'Speak up, man. Either I'm deaf or you're a mumbler.'"

"It may be the high way, it een't the nigh way. When I'm spoke to I like a bit o' Hinglish."

"If he could nubbut walk at the hoss's head," said the tall pitcher, "he'd set one o' the lads at liberty to help Adam on the stack."

"We're very short-handed," said the farmer.

"I'm not clever at anything," said Beiley, "but if you'll show me what you want I'll try to do it."

So to him was assigned the humble duty of guiding between the upstanding stowks the horse attached to the empty waggon. Before its floor was covered with sheaves he had learnt that he must shout "Ho'd yer!" each time that he moved on, as a warning to the loader to steady himself with his fork. When he also understood that "auve" meant draw to the left and "gee" to the right he was efficient for his duties. The work was mere boy's work; the food and drink had put life into him; being honestly, usefully occupied he felt less of the outcast. The animal in the shafts was a bay mare, Vi'let by name, not very big of bone but willing and mettlesome, with a tender mouth. There had been trouble with her during the afternoon, but her present

conductor's hand was gentle and he and she came at once to an understanding. There was a closer relation between the two as fellow-workers than there had ever been between him and the most favoured of his many steeds as rider and ridden-on, driver and driven. And I believe he liked her none the worse for her sex.

"The mare's steadied down," said the tall pitcher.

"She's right enoo," said the farmer, "if she's rightly dealt with, like all females. Vi'let, my beauty!"

The mare heard, lifted her head and made nothing of the growing load. The heat from the slant sun was not so great, fragrant was the all-pervading scent of the straw. The stubble changed according to the point of view. What was now merely a shorn stalk palely semi-transparent, was now a flashlet of pure light. Loud from a neighbouring close on the other side of the ridge came the voices of Barton's beer-encouraged men. The overhanging load grew until horse and driver hardly appeared under it. Then the tall pitcher made the rope fast and tossed it up to the loader; who dropped it down on the other side to Mouldiwarp, who slipped it under the hook and putting his foot to the wheel for purchase pulled it taut. Thus passed and re-passed the rope was duly secured; and Beiley exchanged with Tom Morley loaded waggon for another empty one. The new draught-horse was a gelding, Sparrow by name, dark brown, aged, large-framed, hard-mouthed, steady, somewhat sluggish and a slow starter.

"Why don't yer shout 'Pull up,'" said Joe, "an' gie the rein a good jag?"

"Because I think he'll do without," said Beiley.

He took an interest—being of so low a thing it must not be called a pride—in getting good work out of the animal by his quieter method.

"You've been used to hosses, I can see," said the master when they were again changing waggons.

"Yo handled that mongrel, Sparrer," said Joe, "as if 'e were a gentleman's thoroughbred."

"Why not?" said Beiley.

"Just becos 'e'll be fair spoilt for the nex'-coom driver on 'im."

"Unless the next driver understands something about horses."

"D'yer mean as I don't unnerstan' noat about hosses?"

"I didn't say so."

"Why didn't yer say so? Eh? Why didn't yer? Why not?"

"Because I choose what I say for myself."

"Yo an' yer 'choose'! A thin-gutted London tailor on the road! I hope Parsley ull gie yer a nip ower the elber afore 'e's done wi' yer."

"Auve a bit, London Tailor," said Mouldiwarp; the first words he had spoken since his "not a bite more" during the clockin'.

"I've a text in my mind, friends," said the farmer. "No, it's not for you, Joe, who don't need it, but I believe it's very suitable for everybody else."

"Well, I've noat to say agen texes like that," said Joe. "Some texes—well, I'd sooner be hulled at. Texes, to be civil, ought ayther to be 'iv'rybody 'ere present accepted' or else just to be chucked about like apples for them to scuffle for as likes 'em."

"It is this: 'Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.'"

"That's more commoner sense about hosses," said Joe, "nor yer mostly gits in a tex'; they warn't gen'rally made up by practical men, I reckon. But I've knowed hosses—Mester Brown hed one—as were that 'ard-mouthed, O as hard as flint!—a gret big grey it war—that a traction ingin couldn't a turned his whole body, unless his fancy were that-a-way inclined."

Parsley, the change horse, was a gelding too, but younger and of a lighter brown than Sparrow, with no marked characteristics but the abundance of his snowy fetlocks and a disposition to snap at anything and every-

thing; less it would seem out of vice than an unregulated appetite. At the stoppages his driver fed him with ears of corn out of his hand, and standing quietly let him sniff him all over with his wide inquisitive nostrils.

The harvesters prolonged their toil until the slant magnificence of the sun was replaced by the full-orbed placidity of the moon, and the day's heat was succeeded by an almost frosty chilliness. Barton's men had taken themselves off from the ungarnished close; but the voices of their stack-builders, three furlongs away on the other side of the road, sounded so near, that the harvesters almost persuaded themselves that they could distinguish words.

"That were oad Hooper speakin' then," said the tall pitcher.

"An' that were Timmy's laugh to it," said Joe.

The last top-heavy waggonful was left on the field, the horses were driven homewards, the labourers followed them with lumbering weary gait. Beiley walked in their midst, but with his eyes on the ground, as though he were studying the intricate diapery of light and shade that the moonshine traced among the stubble. But no such thing; his weariness, which had been kept off for a while by the salutary preoccupations of labour, had come back upon him in redoubled force; on his mind even more than on his body. The only thing that distinguished him from an automaton was sensation; his memory was but a dulled sensation, a less pain to him than his blistered feet.

As he passed through the last gate he heard the horses' hooves crunch the stones of the road, and the moment after he felt its hardness to his own tender soles. He stood; the rest drew away from him. When they were but ten yards withdrawn he had already forgotten them, or remembered without discrimination as part and parcel of an unseparated past. Therefore it was instinctively or by mere chance that he turned the same way and limped after them, but when the others went through

the farm gate he kept on down the road. Pullen, remembering him, turned and called to him.

"Come, I don't take it kindly of yer to go off like that without a word said."

The rousing sound of the farmer's voice brought him back to the present.

"Where was yer going to?"

"To Leicester."

"Come in with me; you've addled supper and bed at any rate."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DAY-MAN

LORD BEILEY accompanied the farmer, heard him speak and answered; then straightway forgot both question and reply. He entered the house with him; saw it as a featureless contrivance of passages, doors and walls that shut off the within from the without, in nothing different from every other house; saw men and women in it, but without finer discrimination of them than into men and women. Being invited he sat before a table; immediately his head sank to the level of the board and he was fast asleep. He could not be roused to accept the invitation to eat and drink, but his outer shell was so far stirred into consciousness as to clamber up the flight of steep stairs with him, shed his outer garments and slip into a bed.

It was approaching noon of the next day when Mrs. Pullen, after thrice beating in vain upon his door with no light hand, at last lifted the sneck and peeped in.

"Come, man, come!" she said. "Are yer never going to waken up? It's eleven o'clock time." Beiley opened his eyes but without seeing. "Be ashamed of yerself to lie slugging there, when everybody else is hard at it."

He more than opened his eyes, he saw with them and sat up. Clearly he perceived the long attic, its rude whitewashed walls, its low sloping roof, lightened by a narrow skylight through which the sun shone and fiercely illuminated a strip of plaster flooring, ancient and uneven.

"Where am I?" he said.

"You're at Starnel Farm, Mars'on, Nottinghamshire, England, the World, as we uster say at school. But it's high time you and that bed parted company. The master said yer weren't to be disturbed; but it worrited me to have a man lying asleep when all the rest of uz were up and doing. 'Twas as bad as having a corpse in the house, and a corpse yer weren't int'rested in."

He laid his head back on the pillow.

"Come, none of that! You've got to get up. Consider yerself warned."

So saying she withdrew from the door but without closing it. In a minute or two from the foot of the stairs she called out:

"Are yer getting up?"

"Yes," said Beiley, flinging back the bed-clothes.

"Then let me hear yer on the floor."

He let his feet drop on the cold bare plaster.

"Now founder[1] along, or yer'll hardly be in time to make a dinner of yer breakfast."

In a few minutes he came down to the stair door, which opened into the kitchen. Mrs. Pullen stood at a flap-table under the far window, with much energy rolling out a thick slab of pastry with a rolling-pin.

"Good-morning," said he.

"If it's not too late," said she.

The kitchen was a low spacious room lighted by a window at each end. It was scrupulously clean but for the recent marks of men's boots on the brick floor, and especially under the heavy deal table which stood in the middle.

"That bread and meat on the table's for yer, and the basin of cold tea. Why don't the man begin?"

"I should feel the better for a wash first."

Mrs. Pullen pointed to the pump and sink under the window on the other side of the room.

"There's plenty of water and plenty of soap. The towel hings behind the door."

"Do you allow me to take my coat off?"

[1] Hurry.

"Why not? 'Tisn't like as if 'twere yer skin. I look to hear yer ask permission of the pump next."

The icy cold water straight from the depths of the well was delightful to his hot hands and forehead. He splashed himself to his heart's content, and then rubbed himself dry with the rough jack-towel that hung upon the door.

"Now eat that bit of meat out the road," said Mrs. Pullen; "I'm sick of seeing it about."

While he was eating the daughter of the house entered, a pretty slip of a country maid, red-lipped, with violet eyes under dark-brown hair, cheeks perfectly rounded and of a dusky crimson, in which the hey-day of her blood had so much the better of the sun that it made of his stain an enhancement. She carried in a basket some potatoes which she had been forking up in the garden.

"Look, mother," she said; "these will have to do."

Lord Beiley rose. Apparently she saw him no more when her face was towards him than when her back was.

"You must peel them, mother; it stains my hands so. I'll finish the pies."

Lord Beiley sat again and went on with his eating; he felt of singularly little importance. The girl donned a long white apron, pinned back her sleeves and set to the pie-making. She stood by the window in the best of the light, just out of the sunshine; but scatterings of its rays would be leaving their course in order to play with her hair, and a strong reflection from a saucepan lid on the wall near by was now on her floury fingers, now on her dimpled elbow, and now called attention to the slimness of her waist. Nothing of which Lord Beiley saw; he gave all his attention to his knife and fork until he had cleared his plate.

"There's more where that came from," said the housewife.

"No more, thank you."

"What's your name?"

"Thompson."

"The master told me to tell yer, if yer like to go down to the close he can find yer something to do."

"I will gladly do so."

"He values yer to be worth something like a boy's wage, and that's two shilling a day, or a shilling a day living in."

"I doubt whether I'm worth as much."

"Well, don't make it yer business to turn the doubt into a certainty. And you'd better be moving. A day as begins at noon can't be said to be more than a bad half-day." Beiley rose. "I suppose I must put yer up a mite of dinner, or yer won't be satisfied."

"Quite unnecessary, thank you; I——"

"Well, if you're satisfied the master won't be; which i' this house he makes to be of more consequence. Fetch the meat out again, Vitie."

Miss Pullen bridled up.

"I'll wait on you, mother, but I won't wait on your men. Not likely!"

"I feel sometimes as I could give yer a good smack. I've no patience!" The mother went through a door under the stairs down into the larder, and fetched thence a piece of boiled brisket of beef. "Yer pick and choose yer work just as yer do yer victuals, and saucy at both. I say, drat such niceness!"

"That's swearing, mother!"

"You never heard me swear. I was brought up diff'rent to that. And I was brought up diff'rent to you in a many many ways."

"Tell me one, mother."

"For one thing uz children—talk about saucing our parents—why, we wasn't expected to speak till we was spoke to."

"When did you leave that off? Before you were married or after?"

The mother did not immediately reply, being intent on making up the slices she had cut from the beef into clumsy sandwiches, inch-thick.

"If you don't tell me, I shall ask dada."

"Anyhow it wasn't any great while before, yer may depend on that. Yer dada spoils yer, fair spoils yer."

"Why do you let him, mother, if it's wrong?"

"Let him? Hark at the wench!"

"I won't be called a wench, mother. Polly Cadge is a wench."

"Well, I'm sure, young madam! And what diff'rent flesh and blood are you to Polly Cadge?"

"I mayn't have different flesh and blood but I've a different skin."

Mrs. Pullen was already thrusting the sandwiches into a blue paper sugar-bag. Suddenly the girl turned to the stranger; the first time since her entrance that she had apparently looked his way or given him a thought.

"Do you like fat?" she said.

"A little," said he.

"So do I; just a mite, if it's nice; bark-fat."

She took the bag from her mother's hands, drew the sandwiches out, opened them and proceeded to cut away most of the superabundant fat.

"What ever are yer doing that for?" asked the mother.

"Because it makes me feel bilious to look at them."

She cut another slice or two of lean to replace what she had taken away.

"You'd better put them together again yourself, mother; I don't want it to be supposed that's my idea of a sandwich."

"No, yours hardly make one bite out of a dozen of 'em. But yer needn't think I'm going to stand all this sinful waste of fat, for I won't."

"Put it into a potato-pie, mother."

"Will you eat it?"

"No, mother."

"Then what right have yer to ask other folk to eat it?"

"None whatever; I just choose to. I'm going now to tidy my room."

She was gone before Beiley, and had not taken another

glance at him. He made his way down to the harvesters. He did not feel at all fit; his injured leg still troubled him, his feet were blistered, his joints ached, it appeared to him, each with a separate ache. Mr. Pullen from the waggon that he was loading began to call to him as soon as he was within shouting-distance.

"What time of day do yer call this? What have yer got in that blue bag? Is it your dinner? I should have thought you'd have brought it inside yer. We shall have finished this close by four o'clock. It's sooner too dry than not dry enoo. Well, Joe may say what he likes, but that's a good fault. Then there's the barley wants stowking in the North Piece. Thank the Lord for this spell of fine. But I wish we could school ourselves to thank Him for any sort of weather. What's the matter with yer? Yer don't seem to omble along oh so gaily oh!"

That was the first question that Beiley attempted to answer.

"A blister? Oh, that's bad! Yer should have put a bit of taller in yer stocking; or other grease. Brewster's lad's gone over to Mr. Barton, so we're worse off than ever."

Vi'let was in the shafts. She put her wide-sniffing nostrils to Beiley's cheek and seemed pleased to have him near. By degrees the continual motion oiled his stiffness; he seemed to shed part of his pains along the windrows as he went; his miserable limp became something like the gait of a man.

From the uneyable white of the sun to the grey verge of the horizon the sky was an azure arch, one blue of infinite gradation, image of a divine munificence, resplendent, ungrudging, unparcelled, without reserve. The straw smelt good. The shrill clamour of a congregation of starlings which had taken possession of an oak and the adjacent hedge on the far side of the close, the busy hum of a passing bee, the slow croak of a solitary crow, the rustle of the sheaves as they were uplifted, the boisterous shouts of Barton's harvesters on

the other side of the ridge, the voices of his stackers faint with the distance, the incessant passing of trains in the unseen river valley were part of the general silence. It was so large that their own loud "Ho'd yer!" and the combined jingle, creak and rumble of the heavy-going waggon nowise disturbed it. So long as Beiley could keep his thoughts from going further than he could see, he was wellnigh content in his humble capacity of day-boy. He armed himself with a leafy ash twig to waft the flies away from the horses' heads. Joe grumbled.

"That chap'll ruin them hosses for sensable usage. Mardyin'[1] on 'em up like that!"

"What occasion have you to chunter?"[2] said Pullen from the waggon. "It is written, 'The merciful man is merciful to his beast.'"

"The best marcy yer can show a hoss," said Joe, "if that's what yer mean by a beäst, is a good switch across the rump; it'll help him along better nor oat. P'll up then!"

So saying he brought the shaft of his fork down upon Vi'let's quarters, which made her start and show temper. Beiley as soon as he had quieted her said:

"While I'm leading this mare you'll be good enough to keep your hands off her."

"I shall do as I like," said Joe scornfully. "Yo an' yer 'good enough'! I reckon oat's good enough for sich uns as yo. Pull up, yo damned slut! Auve!"

He had his fork up ready for the stroke, but Beiley kept his eyes upon him and he began to force his bluster.

"What d'yer set me like that for? If yer mean summat say summat."

"I've said all I have to say," said Beiley.

"D'yer want to faight?" Joe stuck his fork in the ground. "Come on then! I'm as fierce as yo."

"Yo've bin to yer brown bottle two 'r three times too often," said the tall pitcher.

[1] Spoiling by indulgence. [2] Grumble.

"What's the matter?" said Pullen, who could not see them from the top of the waggon.

"I do b'lieve there's gooin' to be a faight," said Mouldiwarp with a sleek satisfaction.

"Backs I the winner," said Tom Morley; he had just brought up the unloaded waggon.

"Square up like a man if yo're game, an' coom on," said Joe. "I can't stan' all day waitin' on yer."

"I've something else to do just now," said Beiley. "Ho'd yer!"

He led the waggon on.

"There'll be no faight, not there!" said Tom Morley, disappointed.

"Is that you, Joe Biddle?" shouted the farmer.

"Mebbe 'tis, mebbe 'teen't."

"It's the half of him, it's the tongue-part of him any'ow. Joe, be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools."

"I'm not a fool. To prove it I'll faight the best man on the ground. Can I say fairer nor that? Who are yer laughin' at, Bill Moffrey?"

"At yo," said the tall pitcher.

"Then yo're laughin' at a better man nor yersen."

"It behoves me to believe it sin yo say it."

"Ay, an' I'll mek it good an' all."

"Keep on picking!" shouted Pullen.

Indeed the need to keep on pitching presently reduced Joe's anger to a lukewarm grumbling temperature. Once or twice he was minded to give Parsley a prod, but Beiley and his intention always happened to be on the same side of the horse, and the one's cool watchfulness disconcerted the other's malice.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE CHALLENGE

As the last waggonful was being loaded and the thirstiest time in the whole day was approaching, Pullen said to his new man—or half-man :

"You'd better go and see if the missis has a cup of tea for us."

Beiley went, but met Vitie on the road laden with basket and can. When he had relieved her of them she might have returned, but she said :

"Since I've come so far I may as well go all the way."

When he put down the can and held the gate open for her she liked it.

"You're not used to farm-work, are you?" she asked.

"No," said Beiley.

"What work are you used to?"

"None, I'm afraid."

"Oh! then you won't stop here long."

"Probably not."

The farmer's voice was already hailing them a close and a half away.

"Why did you come an' all, Vitie? Another load and we've done. Thank the Lord for that! And all His favours! What a thirsty climate this is for sure! Have yer seen the dog? Put yer best leg forrard! Barton's are in their Anyhow Cluss. What joint has mother got for to-morrer? The jink of that tin's almost more than I can bear. The Lord knoweth our human frailty, knoweth that we are but dust. And dry dust at that. Come on! We'll have it under the old oak."

As they all moved towards a great tree upstanding from the hedge which ran along the ridge of the hill, they came at last within answering distance. Then he said to Vitie:

"Why have yer put yer best 'at on?"

"Don't pretend to know my hats, dada."

"Well, well! let it pass. That cup of tea seems furder away than ever. Where did yer get that colour, lass?"

"What colour? The ribbon? I got it from Nottingham."

"The ribbon? No, lass; the cheek. It's a sight, isn't it?" This to Beiley.

"It's so hot," said Vitie.

The farmer sat with his broad back to the old oak, Joe and Bill under the low hedge, their feet in the dry ditch; Tom Morley lay all his length along the ground; Mouldiwarp and the peer were unplaced. Vitie pointed with her finger and addressed the latter.

"You must sit there, next to dada."

She took the can and beginning with her father and the new man began to distribute cups of tea.

"I never knew yer do that before, lass," said the farmer.

"If I'd done it once, dada, I shouldn't want to do it again. Give this to Moffrey, Tom, and don't drink it up with your eyes. This is for Biddle. That's only a stranger in it, Biddle. Where is Mouldiwarp? Here, Mouldiwarp."

When they each had cup in hand, she gave them slices of bread and butter and cake round. Mouldiwarp took his portion and pushing through a thin part of the hedge, where it was shaded by the oak, found a place out of sight on the other side.

"But you haven't brought yerself a cup, Vitie," said Pullen; "that was an oversight."

"I'm not thirsty."

"But yer must be with such a many thirsty faces around yer. Yer must sit again me and drink out of my cup."

"I should be in the way."

"Not a bit on't," said her father.

"Most certainly not," said Lord Beiley.

So she sat down between the two and sipped from her father's cup and nibbled a bit of cake. Her girlish beauty seemed to colour all their proceedings. Joe Biddle recovered from his half-tipsy quarrelsomeness, the flies ceased to plague Bill Moffrey, Tom Morley ate without bolting; even Mouldiwarp was drawn out of his reserve and said from the other side of the hedge:

"Shouldn't wunner if this weather lasses."

"Glad to have your presence here, lass," quoth the farmer; "it's worth two extry cups of tea."

"Thanks for the compliment, dada. I should have been satisfied if you'd said one cup, especially as the cup's so big and the tea so sweet."

And what were Beiley's thoughts? Did they not tend even to exaggerate, if possible, the influence of a woman on her world? For the woman in his mind had more than skin-beauty, was high-spirited, fine-witted, honest-hearted, an accomplished woman. But her world was no longer his world; he stood without; which if perhaps the better situation for the appreciation was the worse for the appreciator.

"Isn't your cup empty yet?"

The words brought him back with something of pain, something of relief, to his present. He emptied his cup and accepted another filling; preferred the offer of bread and butter to that of cake; was able, being asked by Pullen if he had ever been in that neighbourhood before, to say no; but when Vitie said: "Then you don't know that place yonder?" was not able to add a second denial; the no on his lips would not come forth. For his eyes following her finger across the river valley beheld the towers that he knew so well, white almost buried in an abundance of green, just peering over the woody brow of a spur set nearly at right angles to the ridge whereon he sat.

"That's Sheraton Towers," said Tom Morley, "that's where the Earl of 'Exgrove lives."

"I expect you've heard of Lady Sally Sallis?" said Vitie.

The yes proved even harder to bring forth than the no.

"I lay her to be a bad madam," said Joe.

Said Lord Beiley, "You're not at liberty to dare——" and stopped. The farmer's eyes were upon him wonderingly. But Joe took up the broken challenge.

"I'm at liberty to do oat as I like. What have yer to say agen that?"

"Be quiet, Joe," said Pullen.

"I wain't be quiet. If any man dares me I dare him."

"A little more tea, Joe?" said Vitie.

The need to say "Just a drop more, miss," stopped the flow of abuse that was ready to issue.

"I think," said Bill, "she were a rank un if she warn't good enough for him."

"Andy Brewster's Aunt Nomi," said Tom Morley, "can drink more nor any man at Loddingham. My eye, she can swear an' all!"

Said Mouldiwarp in his sleek slow burrowing way:

"There's a summat agen iv'rybody if we could on'y worrum it out. There's a many crinkum-crankums i' human natur."

"Ay," said Pullen, "there are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

"Do you stick up for her?" said Vitie to Lord Beiley.

He raised his head. He hung his head. What right had he of all men to lift his broken spear, to interpose his dishonoured shield in her defence?

"I think she knew beforehand," said Vitie. "She'd seen him the morning before; and if he hadn't told her she'd have guessed, or she's a very bad guesser. Besides she made such a little to-do about it; she was the only one there who didn't seem a bit surprised."

There was no answer to it. Pullen and then the men uprose. Bill Moffrey and Joe Biddle, who were to help top the stack up, led the last waggon-load homeward. Tom Morley with Vi'let was set to finish horse-raking the stubble, the others went to a neighbouring field and stowked the barley.

The sun had set and its light was already less than the moon's when the labourers left the field. Moffrey and the lad struck straight across country for Marston, the farmer had already gone home; Beiley therefore walked alone leading Vi'let. A little way from the road-side gate he came upon Joe Biddle standing in the middle of the road straddlings, like an inferior unsteady colossus, and leaning upon his fork.

"Here, yo!" he said in a voice loud but thick. "What's-yer-name! London Tailor! Flat-belly! Mop-stale!"

There was no answer to that choice of epithets. He stood directly in Beiley's way. He had evidently during the evening been applying himself freely to his brown bottle.

"Are yo afeard to answer to yer name?"

He was, but so that he could put a bold front on it, and he answered:

"Not to any name of your calling."

"Yo said as I shouldn't lam the mare when I'd a mind."

"I say so still."

"I say as I shall."

"I've no objection to your saying so."

"An' I will an' all. An' yo an' all. Who are yo?"

"The person temporarily in charge of this mare."

"What's that? Do yer say as I'm a person in a temper? I'll hammer yer for to larn yer better manners, yo thin-gutted sparrer-legged tuppeny noinepin."

He threw down his fork and with the lumbering action of a battering-ram went at Beiley, who simply stepped aside and let him flounder by. Twice he did that.

"Do yer want to faight or don't yer?"

"I leave the choice to you."

"Damn yer mealy mouth! Do yer or don't yer?"

"Well, I don't."

"Then I'll faight yer for not wantin'."

His lunge was so violent, his pose so ill-balanced, that meeting no resistance he fell all his length across the road. Beiley walked on with the mare, leaving him to gather himself up. Biddle was soon up and after him.

"Here, yo!" he cried. "Stop! I want to know if we're faightin' or haein' a walkin'-match."

Beiley stood and answered:

"As you please."

"Put up yer fisses."

Beiley put them up.

"I say her ladyship's a brazen-faced trolly."

"I say you lie."

Up to that moment his courage had been temperate, his eye clear. All at once both failed him. That he of all men should champion her! And that he should do it in such a mode, by way of fisticuffs with a beer-drenched clown! To what had his folly reduced his act and her name? There was a sudden disturbance in his brain, akin at once to the trouble of laughter and of despair. He let fall his fists, and received a blow on his forehead that stunned him for the moment. By the time that he had recovered Biddle had overtaken the mare and was laying in to her with the shaft of his fork, under which she kicked and plunged. But Beiley's anger was superseded by a sense of the man's danger. As he came up three things happened in a succession so close that it was apparent simultaneity; Joe struck the mare across her hocks, the mare's heels flew up, Beiley at some risk to himself thrust the man violently back. Joe fell in a heap, all of a tremble; the narrowness of his escape was clear to himself; the mare's hoof had removed his hat. Beiley sprang to her head, led her aside and quieted her. In a little while Biddle came to him, his hat in his hand, his beery excitement quite gone.

"Yo done me a good turn then, mate," he said. "Wi'out yo I shouldn't hae no brains unner my hat. Will yer come an' hae a drink?"

"No, thank you."

"Name summat yoursen."

"Never again say a word against a woman that you can't honestly swear to."

"I'll try. I've said many a word agen Peggy as warn't exactly gospel, but I'll try. I doubt it'll mester me; but I'll try."

CHAPTER XXXVI

AT A VENTURE

BEILEY awoke next morning before the light had made a winning struggle of it with the darkness. He knew that he should sleep no more, and so was glad to rise and exchange the close air of his ill-ventilated attic for the pure breath of the open. He did not however sit on the bench by the door, though his feet were so sore and his limbs so stiff. He was in such a condition that the pain of motion was less than the irksomeness of rest. He moved away from the door, and his feet, seemingly without the control, hardly with the bare connivance of his brain, bore him to the field which he had helped to harvest the day before, to that spot under the oak which offered a view of Sheraton Towers. He pushed through the hedge and advanced to the brow of the ridge overlooking the solemn reticent beauty of the misty river valley. The light however was as yet insufficient to distinguish the regular outline of the building from the foliage which environed it. Probably the feelings with which he looked were as obscure, as hard to separate. He walked down into the valley and soon Sheraton was hidden from him. Still he advanced across the fields, half a mile or more, until his path was crossed by the river. The mist stood back and let him see it, but gathered again on the farther bank, a thin assemblage of appearances.

The water seemed as motionless almost as a pond. Only in the middle was there a glimmer of life and light; its margins were lined with the dim still shadows of its vaporous banks. His heated condition of body

invited him to undress and plunge in. As soon as the cold water hugged him he felt an upbracing of his feverish lassitude. He turned his head up-stream, which he found to have a strong push though so quiet withal, and he swam in that direction until he was tired. Then he turned over on his back and with his face to the sky allowed himself to drift. Delightful was that cool cradling of the water, its soft lapping about his hot head and its up-bearing flow between his resting legs. He had made his peace with the river. Overhead, miles high, just visible through the vapour, a few fleecy clouds, snow touched with fire, swam in a rarer fluid far more buoyantly than he; he could not say whether the slow motion which changed almost imperceptibly their relative positions was more his or theirs. And while the sky was flushing, palpitating with the anticipation of day, down below earth with a more pensive expectancy was sloughing her general greyishness and donning the colours of her day pageantry. Still he was thinking, "It is not yet morning"; and while he was so thinking, lo! the sun was blazing down upon him through the mist, which was no obstacle to the sudden pomp of its reappearance.

He returned to the homestead in time to take some unimportant share in the necessary Sunday work of the farm. During which the farmer, who had been favourably impressed the day before by his knowledge of horseflesh, was provoked by his apparent ignorance of everything else into saying:

"It beats me that you, knowing so much, should yet know so little. However let's go in to breakfast and try yer there."

Vitie came down the front stairs and entered the smaller apartment, stone-paved, with painted walls and devoid of unnecessary furniture, which went by the name of "the room" and was the usual living-place of the farmer, his wife and daughter. Besides this there was a fair-sized reception room on each side of the hall, one of which was used for mere storage, the other,

furnished in mahogany and containing Vitie's piano, was the parlour of the establishment. The girl noted that the breakfast table was laid as usual for three. She passed through into the kitchen, where the table was also laid for three. Addie the maid and Tom the boy were already seated; Beiley had just finished drying his hands with the towel that hung on the door. Vitie swam in between him and them.

"Good-morning," said she, with the colour of the morning on her face. "You're to come this way, please." He followed her into the room. "You're to sit here, please."

The place to which she showed him was the one which had been occupied by herself ever since she was old enough to sit at table. The farmer was already in his oaken arm-chair. Mrs. Pullen came in from the larder with a ham on a dish. Her eye expressed disapproval, but Vitie was the first to speak, loud and hurriedly:

"What is there for breakfast, mother? Oh, I don't want ham again; I'll poach myself an egg."

"Yer may do as yer like about yer own breakfast," answered her mother, "but if yer want to fix everybody else's yer must get up earlier."

"It's Sunday, mother; I always have my own way on Sundays."

"It's all right," said the farmer.

But Beiley dimly perceived something and rose, saying:

"I beg pardon; it's immaterial to me where I sit."

"Sit," said Mrs. Pullen. "Vitie must get herself another knife and fork; that's all."

But the new day-man was never again expected to place himself at table between Addie and Tom Morley.

When breakfast had been eaten and the table cleared, Tom and Addie came into the room, and all sat round the table except Mrs. Pullen, who drew her chair apart. Bibles were distributed to each and they read in turn verse by verse from the passages selected by the master of the house, the fortieth psalm and the fourth chapter

of Ephesians. Outside the swallows gathering into school twittered on the eaves; within there was no sound but of the one voice which in singular alternation possessed the common ear; the uncouth stumbling spelling boy's, the gentleman's high-bred and colourless, the maid-servant's sing-song, the farmer's loudly perfervid, his daughter's self-conscious but musically intoned. Perhaps to a stranger listening without at the window the effect might have been, according to his idiosyncrasy, somewhat droll, intolerably vulgar or altogether vapid; probably to those who were within and accustomed to it the words passed like mere sound; the effect on Beiley was this; what was read by the others hardly entered his ears, but what fell to his own share seemed every time to have a special pertinence to his own case and impressed him as with a private significance.

After the reading all turned and knelt with their faces to the wall while Pullen prayed. He had not the printed words before him or in his mind, and yet he prayed according to a formula, one begotten out of the common needs and aspirations of many generations of men. Unconsciously he poured forth his traditional litany, and being free from the bond of the letter felt no restraint upon his feelings. With the same rude fervour and artless spontaneity he declaimed ancient eloquence and vulgar modernity, the slang of the street and of the pulpit; but the link which united them was a natural one, and the person who might have been expected to be most sensitive to the incongruity was most struck by the sincerity.

In the afternoon Beiley strolled out again, and again towards that specular oak-tree; but the object which he chose to keep in view was the desirability of its broad shadow as a place of rest that sunny day. He sat under it; but I cannot say whether he was more looking or resting when he heard the sound of many voices singing below in the valley. He rose and walked gently in the direction of the sound; possibly in a mere afternoon curiosity, possibly because every step that way took

him nearer to Sheraton. Before him was the river's lordly path traced in silver on a ground of green. The tall chimneys of the populous manufacturing villages on the other side were at rest and the sun had his way from hill to hill. Soon the singing of many changed to the speech of one, a man's voice apparently in solemn invocation. Beiley was still a wide field off when he came in sight of a waggon drawn up under the shelter of a spreading sycamore. On the waggon were standing some half-dozen men bent as in the act of prayer; about it were a number of men, women and children, also in the attitude of supplication, some on their feet, others seated upon forms. Evidently they were unconventional folk who had thought it a pleasanter thing to worship out of doors in such weather than under the confinement of walls. After the prayer the people sang another hymn; Beiley stood in the same place and listened. There is a music strangely affecting in a distant human voice, and especially in a consonance of human voices, whether speaking or singing. The sound passes through the discipline of distance as a soul does through that of life, and softened of its asperities, purged of its grossnesses, comes to the ear newly harmonized, with a sifted rareness and transcendental meanings. Still Beiley drew nearer.

"A certain man drew a bow at a venture."

Until he heard that loud resonant voice and recognized it as Pullen's, he had not been aware that the singing had ceased.

"May-be, friends, it was the only time that day that the man drew his bow. Anyhow he slew a king with his one shot. We've no information that he was a particular good shooter with the bow; from him shooting at a venture I'm led to believe otherwise. Or maybe he was a thoughtful man, and knew that it's not the intention of the mind that gives the aim to an arrer. The bow controls it, the cord drives it, the wynd wafts it, the earth pulls it; and above all every arrer has to pass between God's fingers."

There came to Beiley's ears a murmur as of assent from the hearers.

"If I thought otherwise I wouldn't stand up here to-day, or any day. I'm no shooter either with the bow or the mouth. I'm one o' them marksmen whose only chance of hitting is to shut their eyes. But the shut eye, friends, is the true attitude of prayer. That's the meaning of it; we've no aim of our own. Friends, let us shut our eyes for a minute."

There was silence for a short time, during which Beiley's thoughts wandered from the time and the place. Suddenly that trumpet-like voice sounded again, louder, clearer than ever:

"Whose son art thou, thou young man?"

It struck him as if it had been aimed at him. There was more from the same voice, the giving out of chapter and verse, comment loud and impressive; but he was like a man who has just received a stunning blow, which at the same instant gives the shock and takes away the sensibility to further shock. He returned to his seat under the tree; but the accompaniment to his heavy footsteps was neither the one man's voice in the valley below nor yet the many voices, but a woman's. It seemed to come over the hills from the direction of Sheraton and to cry with a high-pitched insistence:

"Whose son art thou, thou young man?"

CHAPTER XXXVII

ON DIT

THE hard out-door work, the early hours, the common food, the strenuous quietude of the farm had even in a few days a most salutary effect upon Beiley's body, mind and spirits. He slept more soundly at night, had a shred of self-respect restored to him, saw his situation with less exaggeration, felt capable of resolving something, above all of attempting something, could even face his despair with a show of manhood. The chink of silver that he had fairly earned had a sound beyond the choicest of bought music. At the end of the week it was paid into his hand with the compliment that he had fairly earned it, and the first use he made of it was to discharge his debt to the ferryman. A week later he wrote to Fasson making an appointment with him at Leicester for the following Monday.

The meeting was so perfectly business-like that the two men's preliminary constraint was got over in the mere act of sitting down together. In half an hour Beiley was able to detail his plans, express his orders, make all necessary enquiries and arrangements. His immediate intention was to remain the winter with Pullen, if the farmer did not object; his wider forecast had not yet made its choice between wheat-farming in Saskatchewan, cattle-ranching in Dakota or horse-breeding in New South Wales. His orders included certain instructions with regard to Jack the tramp, his enquiries did not go so far as Lady Sally; her name was not mentioned, her existence even was not hinted at. Or only so far as this; when the agent asked

whether he was to make a secret of his employer's whereabouts, he received for answer a quick decided "Yes"; deliberately qualified by "Unless somebody asks whom you can't refuse." Without the direct question he gathered that Lord Selstone had respected his secret.

His business in Leicester comprised a visit to an outfitter; where he purchased a complete equipment of such outside clothing as beseems the condition of someone between farmer or cottager and gamekeeper, besides underwear of a more delicate quality. He forgot the box of cigars for himself, but did not forget to give Fasson picture-cards to post to Bertha, together with the letter which he had written the evening before while the rest of the family were at chapel.

His reappearance at the Starnel made something of a stir, the expression of which ranged from Vitie's quick blush and Tom Morley's slow gape to the blunt "Shouldn't a knowed yer if 't'adn't been for yer ahfters an' aufs" of Addie the maid, and Mrs. Pullen's meaningly uttered "Yer've made a good market of yer money at Leicester; I begin to think it ud pay me to trade there myself."

The same evening he came to an agreement with the farmer, who though he had no need of an extra hand after that week, was willing for a very moderate consideration to keep him during the winter as a working pupil. Beiley explained that he was thinking of emigrating but before doing so was desirous of learning something of practical farming. At his request Pullen kept his change of status secret from everybody but Mrs. Pullen and made no noticeable alteration in their relations. It need but just be mentioned that he journeyed to Lindum the day that Jack the tramp's time was up, met him coming out of jail and had some conversation with him. Thereafter he continued to lead the life of a field-labourer; only he had a bath in his bedroom and gave Addie half-a-crown a week for attending to it. The expression at least of Mrs. Pullen's wonderment was cut short by her husband.

"We've no more right," he said, "to know his name than to take his money without his goodwill."

Meanwhile Miss Percival had left Hull and taken up her abode in London; which only concerns us because towards the end of November she called upon Lady Sally at the Earl of Hexgrove's town house.

"I expect you're rather wondering why I've asked to see you," she said.

"I've hardly had time," said Lady Sally.

"To come to the point at once then, my visit is not unconnected with a certain nobleman who is—or rather was—not unconnected with yourself."

Miss Percival's eyes and ears were attentive, but Lady Sally neither changed countenance nor voice as she said:

"Do you mean Lord Beiley?"

"It's just what I do mean."

"Then please say what you mean or I shall very likely misunderstand you."

"You haven't begun so at all events. But saying what I mean's as much my style as yours; we shan't quarrel about that. Do you take in the *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat?*"

"No."

"Of course not; you're in the know without. I, who want to get into the know, am obliged to. I'm the heiress of a financier who has recently died. He was so wrapped up in business he couldn't give me the society advantages that properly belong to a large fortune. Now I mean to go in for all I can get."

"Excuse me if I don't see in that any clue to the purpose of this visit."

"It's there all the same. I take it for granted you want to get even with Lord Beiley."

"Since you've taken it for granted there's no more to be said."

"Well, if you want to kick him he's in the right position for the kick; down flat on his back."

Miss Percival put into Lady Sally's hand a copy of

the current number of the periodical she had mentioned, open at the page headed "Under the Rose," and while doing so pointed to a paragraph distinguished by a threefold pencil mark.

"What do you make of that?"

I do not know whether most to admire the benevolence, courage or omniscience of the modern press, which not content with bestowing a general benefit on its subscribers offers each of them the minutest individual attention, and takes a kindly interest in the condition of their pseudonymous stomachs, affections, investments, gardening, reading, legal difficulties and religious doubts. The page which came under Lady Sally's eye was with a fine delicacy reserved for editorial advice to correspondents upon their love affairs. Directed by Miss Percival's finger and the treble pencil mark, this is what Lady Sally read:

"VITELLA: I am a farmer's daughter and only eighteen. A man has lately come to live with us as a labourer, who I have grown to quite take a romantic interest in. There is something mysterious about him; he has such different manners. I am usually considered rather pretty, but I should very much like to know what he thinks. How could I find out? I am only *interested*, you know. Has a blue bead ring on the little finger of the left hand any particular meaning?

"EDITRESS: What you write, dear, about your enigmatic labourer has deeply *interested* me. (I must not go beyond you, you know, in my expressions.) Is it impossible that Vitella's bright eyes and *rather* pretty face have something to do with the 'something mysterious'? I do not see that you can do anything in order to elicit from him the expression of opinion which you desire, except continue to behave as nicely to him as possible; and that should surely be enough. I hope that very soon you will be in a position not only to inform me *on the best authority* 'what he thinks,' but also to expatiate *without indelicacy* upon what you think. I shall be delighted to hear again from you, dear. I am not

aware of any symbolism specially attaching to a blue bead ring upon any finger whatever. If you have a little sister of six, perhaps she could enlighten you. Little sisters are sometimes *rather* convenient."

"What do you make of that?" said Miss Percival again.

"Unless you can convince me that you have a special interest in asking me and that I have in satisfying you, I don't feel myself called upon to make anything of it."

"I have a personal interest of course or I shouldn't be here. I shouldn't have the cheek to take a perfectly gratuitous interest in your concerns; it would be a jolly liberty to do that to anybody above a pauper. But what I want you to take in is that your interest in that awfully soft stuff you've just read—you did read it, didn't you?"—Lady Sally made the slightest of affirmative gestures—"is paramount."

Miss Percival paused, apparently giving Lady Sally time to request an explanation. She had however to continue uninvited.

"I've met Lord Beiley twice since he has been in hiding, and each time he wore a blue bead ring on the little finger of his left hand."

Her attempt at raising a flutter in Lady Sally by means of surprise was no more successful than her attempt by means of suspense.

"His taste in jewellery has changed apparently," was all Lady Sally had to say.

"Don't you think, Lady Sally, it establishes a pretty obvious connection between him and the mysterious farm-labourer?"

"It does rather seem like it."

"I thought you'd perhaps sooner have the following up of the clue in your own hands than in the lawyer's."

Miss Percival made a pause, which Lady Sally occupied with a speech of cool thanks.

"It was good of you to think of that."

"He seemed considerably the worse for wear the last time I saw him. He'd evidently been having a ghastly

time of it; looked quite run to seed and was dressed like a cadger."

"Did he complain at all?"

"Not he."

Miss Percival's keen eyes and ears were wholly upon Lady Sally, but could detect in her no change of skin or voice, nor other token that she was troubled by anger or regret or even by the excitement of curiosity. She waited a minute but was asked no further question. She was clever enough to understand that what little advantage she had gained she would lose by insistence; she rose. Lady Sally expressed a civil gratitude.

"The information you've been kind enough to bring me is of considerable importance to Lord Beiley's family."

"Including yourself?"

"Certainly. Thank you."

"Then when you see me again, and you will see me again, you won't have forgotten me?"

"I've a fairly good memory for faces."

"Well, I don't know that my face takes any more remembering than other folks'."

"You are forgetting your newspaper."

"You prefer to buy one for yourself? All right. Good-morning."

Lady Sally did buy one for herself, and with it in her hand called the same day on the editress; whom she found to be a man, middle-aged, rotundly mediocre of appearance, a confirmed old bachelor, but with an extraordinary knowledge of everything that men are supposed to know nothing about, cosmetics, underwear, hair-dressing, mother's influence, obesity, cutting-out, etiquette and babies. He politely but firmly refused her request to be told Vitella's address; it was quite out of the question, he said, would be a breach of faith with their correspondent, a quite unheard-of proceeding in the press-world. She offered every possible indemnity but without success. Still she held her ground.

"Kindly say upon what terms I may have the information."

"You may have it, Lady Sally, upon one condition only. The *Complete Lady* has been beforehand with us in a society par; as probably you've heard."

"I never heard of the *Complete Lady*."

He put a press-cutting into her hand and invited her to read it.

"*On dit* that Lady Sally Sallis has completely consoled herself for the unfortunate *contre-temps* of last Whitsuntide, and will shortly allow her engagement to one of the handsomest and wealthiest young bachelors of the English peerage to be announced."

"What do you want me to do with this besides read it?" she said. "Burn it?"

"I want your permission to give it an authoritative *démenti* or else to pooh-pooh it as something that everybody knew weeks ago."

"And in return for that——?"

"You shall have the envelope in which Vitella's letter came."

"How about the breach of faith?"

"It isn't quite that; it's only an indiscretion, and hardly that. You see I've so got into the way of humouring our fair *clientèle* by giving fancy names to ordinary articles."

"So you called it a breach of faith in order to humour me?"

"Say rather in order to impress you."

"It didn't; I felt humbugged."

"And humbug it was. Unless you prefer the expression hyperbole?"

"I wish, sir, you'd say what you think."

"I only wish I could. When I was young, Lady Sally, I called oil for the hair hair-oil, like everybody else. Would that do now-a-days? I appeal to you; as a lady."

"What would you call cart-oil?"

"I leave that to cart-artists; I'm a man of one talent, Unless you prefer to call it one fatuity?"

"I leave the naming to the owner of the quality."

"It's very good of you. My fellow press-men—and even press-women—won't. In return allow me to change my mind about that *on dit*. I don't call it an *on dit* because I'm at all gone upon the name—are you?—only my fair clients accept it as a quite different article to English twaddle." He took an envelope from a pigeon-hole of his desk and put it in her hand. "Your ladyship shall have it as a gift."

"I prefer to have it as a bargain. But don't you think such an interest in my private concerns is a piece of gross impertinence on your part and your readers'?"

"On my readers' part, certainly. Unless you'll let me term it natural curiosity or heaven-implanted what-is-it? It's they who're interested in you; I'm only interested in them and their weekly twopence ha'pennies."

"You're very frank."

"Am I? I really don't know; it may be; I leave it to you. I always leave it to somebody. You see if I've butter for sale—or think I have—and you're willing to give me the price of butter, it wouldn't be fair to object to your calling it margarine if you prefer, or ambrosia if you prefer."

"You seem to have very much of the shopman in you."

A gleam of pleasure lighted up his dull flabby face.

"Do you really think so? or only——? It's my dream, that of being a shopman; day-dream, I haven't time for night-dreams; a shopman with a tiny shop, so small that I can reach everything without getting up; and there I sit all day and sell twopence ha'pennyworths of anything, always twopence ha'pennyworths, and all warranted to be anything you like to call them."

"You may say, you're authoritatively informed that Lady Sally Sallis is engaged; not an atom more."

"Thank you; that'll do. I don't know but that this little fissure as an outlet for—which was your selection? culpable curiosity or innocent inquisitiveness?—is a

better paying spec than a column of authentic particulars. I've seen ladies sit for half an hour with their eyes on two lines of nothing in particular, thinking all the while that what was passing through their own minds was in print before them."

Two days later appeared the weekly issue of the *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat;* wherein was the following paragraph in a letter of odds and ends above the signature of "Butterfly":

"Oh, but I had almost forgotten Lady Sally Sallis! Just fancy! A piece of *perfectly conjectural* guesswork concerning her has been put forth with much sound of *Sixpenny* trumpets by a contemporary, of whose very existence Lady Sally was until I called her attention to it positively unaware. Affairs however have now just so far progressed that we are permitted to *authoritatively* announce the fact of her engagement. So far and no further, as King Canute remarked to an element not *quite* so voracious as your curiosity, my dear. However so it must be; *for reasons*. The romantic details of this most interesting event I reserve for a future *bonne bouche*."

Possibly the reading of the above made some change in Miss Percival's projects. Anyhow she had the same day an interview with the man-editress of the *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat;* during which we beg to be allowed to keep the ear of imagination aloof from the key-hole of disclosure. Out of delicacy no doubt, but also, let us confess, out of a want of such curiosity as would have overcome that delicacy.

So we have willed ourselves to be content never to know whether Miss Percival was drawn on by like scruples to those which prepared Lady Sally to concede more than she had been willing to concede; never to know by what facility of consent those scruples were swept away. All we may know is that Miss Percival came away satisfied, and that in the next number of the *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat* appeared a lengthy notice of Miss Percival's ancestry, which it appears

was respectable, of her fortune, which was indubitably more than respectable, but nothing about her aspirations, which we conjecture to have been more noteworthy than either. Whether it was paid for by Miss Percival as an advertisement, or paid for by the editor-editress as good copy, or inserted on mutual terms, is one of those mysteries which give its odour of semi-sanctity to modern journalism.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

FOG AND PHŒBUS

On the same day at the same hour Lord Beiley was striding along to the sheep on Hibbert's turnips. The sun was shining brightly, its rays being softened, not subdued by the thickness of the air, which gave a tender indistinctness to the not distant trees of Cliff Wood, wrapped the river valley in a white mist and in the opposite quarter brought the horizon so much nearer, that instead of embracing the wolds it did not extend its vague outline beyond the hither borders of the meadows watered and sometimes over-watered by Fair Brook. He bore on his shoulders a large sack of chop, a mixture of cut hay and straw, and a bag of oil-cake. He spent the next hour and a half in slicing roots and apportioning them together with the chop and cake among the different racks and troughs. All at once he perceived that the sun's light had been put out with the suddenness of extinguisher or puff of breath to candle. He looked up to ascertain what had so quickly reduced day to twilight. A slight breeze was disturbing the hitherto still air, on which a massed fog was coming up from the river like a moving wall, hiding everything before which it advanced.

He had done his work with the sheep; he flung the empty sack and bag over his shoulder and walked down towards the road. But the fog quickly pushing on was there before him. The separation between the transparent air and the opaque was so well marked, that in half a dozen strides he passed from day to night. Nevertheless he reached the road in safety and began to

descend. When he judged himself to be at the cross-roads he saw a face before him, in profile, as it were suspended, ghost-like; for by some vagary of the moving fog he saw the face a second before the body or the horse whereon the body sat. He stood breathless. The fog had given the face something of its own insubstantiality. He caught himself in a doubt whether it were real or a projection of his own imagination. But the horse was indubitably corporeal, being Phœbus, own brother to the more famous Gaslight; which settled the doubt on this side of sanity. The rider turned to the left and rode away downhill without seeing him.

He entered the house just after the farmer; Mrs. Pullen and Vitie were sitting down to tea. There was that on his face which made the farmer exclaim:

"Has anything happened yer?"

"Did yer see anybody?" said Mrs. Pullen directly after.

The lamp-lit materiality of all about him, the furniture, the food, the man's, the women's faces, and the indubitableness of their voices made what passed without seem all the more unreal.

"I believe I saw—a lady," he answered hesitatingly.

He did not notice Vitie's face, which was turned towards him with more eagerness than either her father's or mother's.

"Believe?" said Mrs. Pullen. "I understand believe about what yer think and especially about what you're told; I don't understand it about what yer see."

Said Vitie impulsively, "She'd a ring with a big ruby on the middle finger;" and then she turned away and affected to be busy cutting bread and butter, as though she wished she had not spoken.

The mention of the ring raised in Beiley's mind a sudden insurrection of hopes and fears, attended by a nameless insubordinate mob of unreasonablenesses which, as in all such cases of popular tumult, led rather than followed their leaders.

"Which road did she take?" asked Pullen,

"She turned down towards Wrighton," answered Beiley.

"Please the Lord she knows the way! It'll be pitch dark down there. What lady is't? Where does she belong?"

All three faces were turned to Beiley.

"What does it matter?" asked he.

"It matters greatly," said Pullen, "whether she makes for the river or the hills. I've known a man to be up to the shou'ders i' the Trent a night like this before ever he knew he'd left the hard road."

Beiley walked straight out of doors; but he would appear to have given some kind of unvocal imperative call to the farmer, who forthwith followed him out. Then he leant back bringing himself so near that his whisper had the value of a shout.

"She's from Sheraton."

"Then she'll be trying for Amberton bridge; she ought to be turned. Wait while I reach my hat. She must go back Nottingham way."

But even at the moment of going he faced about, put his hand on Beiley's shoulder, and said in his ear with a solemnity that was all the more impressive for its being so compressed:

"Whose son art *thou,* thou young man?"

Beiley made no answer and Pullen waited for none; but however speedily the farmer got his hat and returned, the younger man was already out of sight behind the fog-screen.

Either from the advance of night or the increase of the fog Beiley found it darker than before at the cross-roads; nevertheless he blundered into the proper road for Wrighton. As he descended the dark became so gross, so almost palpable, that once or twice he put up his hands as if to push it from him. Still he ran on in a straight line as he thought. But he must have swerved into a by-way, for after he had gone about a mile he discovered by a dim dispirited light from a cottage window, that he was in the midst of Marston

village instead of half-way to Wrighton. He made inquiries at the cottage and its inmates did all they could for him, bedanged the fog, advised him to take himself home as speedily as possible, bade him turn to the left and moreover lent him a horn lantern. But the lantern hardly illuminating a dim yard of ground before his feet turned the former darkness into a circular wall of black; he must have gone wrong almost at once. Anyhow the ground began to rise under him, which should not have been. He put the candle out, as worse than useless, and returned. Soon he heard the footfalls of a horse just in front of him; then a large formless shadowy anything, as he rather felt than saw, seemed to come up out of the ground, rise over him and stand.

"Is somebody there?" said a voice which he knew, from above him.

"Yes."

"Can you tell me where I am?"

"I can't."

There was a change in the voice at the next utterance, a change proper to the asking of a more personal question.

"Perhaps I ought rather to have said, 'Can you tell me where you are?'"

"I can't."

"Well," said the voice again, but in a lighter tone, "which of us shall lead and which follow? For the one appears to be just as wise as the other."

"It's for you to choose."

"Very well; I choose that we leave it to Phœbus."

"Which way did you come?"

"Through Nottingham. Move on, Phœbus."

Beiley stood aside while the horse moved on, upward; then followed, guided mainly by the sound. For some minutes they proceeded thus, silently, in the enveloping gloom, which however was gradually thinning. Still Beiley, though almost within touch of the horse's quarters, saw nothing before him, at least with the bodily eye, save a shapeless apparition. His thoughts were too

inconsistent, too inextricably involved, too desperate and too sanguine for any pen-description. Only this one vain aspiration remained constant in the general inconstancy: Would he might remain for ever, he and she, or that appearance of her, in that circular gloom, that common unresolved uncertainty. He dreaded more than anything, more than a confirmation of his despair, more than the final bludgeoning of his desperate hope, that seeing of her face to face which he knew to be at hand.

It came, that expected thing, sooner and otherwise than was expected. A sudden inroad of the breeze that was ever prowling round the edges of the fog caused a temporary displacement, and let in a wan light which if it had ever belonged to the sun had been robbed by the way of all its life and colour. All at once he was aware that she was looking at him. Resting her hand on the animal's haunch she was looking back and down on him fixedly. The thick air gave the effect of something seen from afar, and he looked up at her with less discomposure than would have been possible if he had felt himself to be in her near presence. For twenty quick pulsations of his heart he saw her thus. Then the broken fog pieced itself together again, if anything more solidly than ever. But within him if there had been tumult before, now there was anarchy, wherein each emotion seemed to be fighting not for the mastery but to make mastery impossible; so that when Phœbus, instinct-led, came where the main road crossed the by-way, and turned up by the manor-house wall, Beiley stumbled into the ditch.

"Are you all right?" asked the horse's rider.

"Yes," he answered.

His "yes" may have had something of the quality of a "yeth," for the rejoinder was immediate:

"How did you lose that tooth?"

He could not reply at once, he had to grope for the lantern which he had dropped. Leaving him to find and follow, which he quickly did, Phœbus strode on

and more briskly, as if with a greater certainty, and always uphill. Soon the fog was so much lessened that a tree which they passed showed unsubstantially through it; as also in an increasing degree a second and third tree. So they reached the brow of the hill, where the general dusk owed less to the fog than to night and was qualified by the rising moon. There the rider again stayed her horse. Beiley, who had fallen some dozen yards behind, had to make up the interval; which seemed so long not through the lagging of his feet but the activity of his mind. As soon as he came up she turned and said in the same tone as before:

"That tooth—how did you lose it?"

"It was some ruffians; they assaulted a poor woman."

"Where was that?"

His eyes had escaped from hers. His perceptions took in perfectly the unsteadiness of his voice and the even balance of hers, the clinging of her dark skirt from the knee downwards to the forth-peeping of boot and stirrup, the lustre of Phœbus's tawny coat, and especially the gloved hand that held the whip and, if he could have believed it, wore his ring; but outside those narrow bounds he saw everything through a haze of irrelevancy thicker than the fog, which now indeed stood off and was passive to the moonshine. Lady Sally repeated the question; he had to draw himself together, compel himself to look a little way into the thick irrelevancy.

"It was somewhere—I believe—not very far from here."

"What woman was it?"

"I don't know. A poor idiot."

"Tally? Then I've heard about it. Some boys threw stones at you?"

"Yes. No, that was another time. The next day."

"You must tell me all about it."

"Two or three men took something from her, and of course I had to—interfere."

"Why of course? Do you always interfere between men and women?"

He was silent; not because his way to an answer was dark, but because it was so terribly uplighted and clear.

"Anyhow your interference on that occasion was successful, I hope?"

"I don't know that. Yes, it was about a basket; we kept the basket."

"The manilla bag?"

"I can't say."

"Of course she recognized you; she never forgets anybody. She came to me that evening, and I've no doubt tried to tell me about it, if I hadn't been too thick to understand her. By the bye do you know what Tally means?"

"No."

But he hesitated over the negation, as though a possibility were even then in the act of presenting itself.

"It means just the same as Sally."

She gave it a minute to sink in, then asked:

"What do you say?"

"I did my best anyhow."

"Then the name counts for nothing?"

She repeated the question and perforce he answered, in a low unsteady voice with bowed head.

"It's part of every woman in the world."

Her reply seemed to make light of it.

"Tally is much indebted to you."

When he lifted his eyes the full moon had risen clear of the fog and triumphed over it. Permeated by her influence what had seemed an earthy obstruction became an ethereal transparency. They stood in the midst of a dome; the roof of it was a black terror and the walls a white wonder, a fabric whereof the warp was air and the woof threads of light.

At last Phœbus lifted an impatient hoof and pawed the ground.

"Phœbus is quite right," said Lady Sally; "it is high time we were travelling homewards. By the bye to-day is the sixteenth, just six months and a half

since the first of June. I should like to know how you've been spending the interval. Unless you think the curiosity unwarranted."

"I might be allowed to think it surprising."

"Oh, I'd made up my mind to surprise you for once. That's only a fair tit-for-tat, you know. But this is hardly the place or time for a narration of such length and interest."

"I'm entirely at your disposition."

"At your earliest opportunity then. Good-night."

She trotted away towards Nottingham; he followed more slowly afoot, until he met Mouldiwarp returning from work at Glafford with his dinner-basket full of sticks slung over his shoulder.

"Did you meet a lady on horseback?" he asked.

"Ay."

"What sort of a horse?"

"Ginger."

Mouldiwarp peered at Beiley in his sly sleek way.

"Yer don't ax me what sort o' lady."

"I do."

"Tidyish. I took partic'lar notice on 'er."

"Why?"

"Becos she looked back at me; twice."

"At you?"

"Yo not bein' i' sight."

"Was she all right for Nottingham?"

"Ay."

The two men returned together. Mouldiwarp, who had fallen back at one drop into his habitual taciturnity, parted company at the cross-roads, where he took his proper way as surely as if he were as indifferent to the dark as his namesake the burrower. It must not however be supposed that he was missed. Beiley's mind was too busy, not laboriously resolving—he had resolved at one stroke, once for all—but imagining issues, seeing the unseen and providing for the unforeseeable, encouraging himself with apprehensions, terrifying himself with hopes, recalling the scene he had just taken part in,

rehearsing the possibilities and even the impossibilities of the morrow. For that he must prepare then to see Lady Sally again was the only thing that was quite clear to him. There was not only the formal invitation, he fully recognized that her whole personality had long been calling him back, a summons which could no longer be refused the due appearance and answer. But since he had left her so unceremoniously it was all the more incumbent on him to go back in proper form, put on the outside of a gentleman however much the inward self-assurance might be wanting. It was just possible for him to travel to Stoke Clure and return within the day; he knew that already.

But things the most ethereal have their basis upon matter, and love's affairs may be dependent on things so gross as turnips and cabbages. As soon as he entered the house, Pullen who had gone in but a few minutes before him said:

"Have yer seen her again?"

"Yes," answered he; "she is right for Nottingham."

Then when he was on the point of mentioning his desire to leave Marston as early as possible in the morning, he was anticipated by Pullen saying:

"We must all of us founder[1] to-morrer and finish pieing up them mangolds in the Far Close before the weather breaks up."

Beiley had a sincere respect and liking for the old man, who had behaved towards him with singular kindness and delicacy, and he would not for his own ends make a breach in duty towards him. After all he had but to put the day after to-morrow for the morrow in his imaginings, hardly more than a difference of sound; the rest remained.

[1] Make haste.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FAR-NIGH CLOSE

NEXT day Miss Percival drove in a hired brougham from Nottingham to the Starnel, and inquired if they employed a man there of the name of—she'd forgotten what—Jackson was it? or was it—what was it? Mrs. Pullen said they had a man on the farm of the name of Thompson. Thompson, of course. Could Miss Percival see him?

"He's out at work," said Mrs. Pullen, "and I haven't anybody to send just now; the gell's churning."

Vitie stood behind a little way off, just visible in the dimmer light of the house, and looked on with much of curiosity, something of jealousy, at that self-possessed well-dressed young woman.

"Who is that?" said Miss Percival. "Your daughter perhaps? Couldn't she go?"

"She can if she likes, and she can't if she don't like."

"I won't go," said Vitie.

"Ah, is that Vitella?" said Miss Percival.

"No, we've no such ridiculous name in our family. She's my daughter and her name's Vi'let; but we call her Vitie."

Vitie had drawn further back the more to hide the red disturbance of her cheeks.

"Still I'll call her Vitella, if you don't mind," said Miss Percival.

"I do mind," said Mrs. Pullen. "I won't have my gell called out of her name."

"Very well, but to be consistent you must stop other people from calling her 'out of her name.'"

"I didn't know anybody did. Who does?"

Miss Percival spoke, but her voice was directed past Mrs. Pullen into the house.

"I want you to come with me and show me the way; if you please—Vitie."

The girl perceived the threat that was veiled by the thin courtesy; her hesitation was but momentary; she took the nearest hat from the row of pegs on the kitchen wall and came forward.

"She shan't go," said Mrs. Pullen, "unless she's content to go."

"It's all right, mother," said Vitie; "I'm going."

She was down the steps by then. Her mother had no time to remark upon the contrast between the hotness of her cheeks and the chilliness of the day. She went before Miss Percival to the carriage door and entered after her.

"So you are Vitella?" said the money-lender's daughter.

"I've been a great soft," said the farmer's.

"So you have. But that's nothing to me. How long has this Thompson been with you?"

"Two or three months."

"Has anybody been to see him lately?"

"Not that I know of."

"Not a young lady a little taller than me and rather scraggy, as stiff as a poker, with towy hair dressed coronet fashion?"

"She called yesterday and asked for a drink of milk."

"Did she see Thompson?"

"He wasn't at home."

"But she inquired after him?"

"No."

"What did she say?"

"She talked about chilblains and Alderneys with mother——"

"And *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrats* with you?"

"No, she didn't; she was as nice as could be."

A little further and the girl said:

"You may stop here. He'll be in the next field."

"Oh, I can't be tramping over your dirty fields after him; you must go and fetch him."

"I don't know that he'll come."

"Oh yes, he will." Miss Percival had stopped the carriage. She spoke so that her words should not go further than the one pair of ears. "Tell him Lady Sally desires to speak with him."

The girl did not hide her astonishment.

"Are you——? Is he——?"

"Why not?"

Vitie had stepped out and felt the more freedom; she turned and faced her tormentress boldly.

"Then I'm not surprised."

The offence that Miss Percival took was mere amusement.

"No, you don't know enough to be surprised. Be sharp, Vitella."

Vitie turned away quickly lest she should hear more, lest she should show more. As she trod the black frost-bitten fallow she faced a keen north-east wind; the sky was morosely grey. Lord Beiley was in the second field helping to pie the mangolds which lay along the headland in a drawn-out heap. Part was yet bare and showed the hues of the roots in rich confusion; orange, yellow, greens pale and dusky, hoary browns and crimson; the middle portion was snugly covered with straw, the farther end was already coated also with a thick layer of earth. There he and the farmer were hard at work with their spades. Joe Biddle and Tom Morley were carting up more roots, ready cleaned, from the rounded piles which dotted the ground. The farmer's all-embracing eyes took Vitie in as soon as she had passed the gate.

"What brings yer here, lass?" he shouted.

"I'll tell you when I'm nearer."

"Speak up; I can't hear. Has the butter come? Did yer say 'yes'? Joe tells me heggs are five at Nottingham. What did the miller say?" And so Vitie

without haste drew near. "What cheeks you've gotten, lass!"

"I'm rather warm," said Vitie.

"Warm, did yer say? Yer might have walked straight from a furnace fire. What's your arrand? Yer haven't a word for a groat, seemingly."

Vitie had indeed no relish for her errand.

"I've got a message for—for Thompson," she said.

"Well, Thompson's here, large as life."

But Beiley, premonished perhaps by the girl's momentary hesitation over his name or other flaw in her manner, had already stuck his spade in the ground and left it. He allowed Vitie to lead him a few yards apart. Her eyes were downcast and voice low.

"Lady Sally desires to speak with you."

He went forward. Lady Sally had come with so unexpected an announcement that his fear was by far the greater part of his hope. He walked, Vitie hanging back a little, under the high hedge now leafless but for the withering purples of the bramble and the living green of the ivy; but when he came out into the gatestead he found himself face to face with Miss Percival, who had gone so far to meet him. Having been already shaken by one surprise he was the less able to resist this second. She was dressed with an elaboration which under the circumstances was almost an insult, so loudly at variance with that bleak rough fallow were her Parisian boots of glazed kid, her rustling black silk skirts, her befeathered hat; as was the tight-fitting mourning glove with the soiled toil-hardened hand to which she offered it. In her other hand was a roll of paper. Vitie walked off.

"So sorry to raise such expectations only to disappoint them," said Miss Percival, "but I knew my name wouldn't fetch you. I couldn't be sure even that you'd remember it."

Beiley stood; a brief lifting of the hat was his only acknowledgment of her words and presence.

"You're looking decidedly better," she said.

"I hope you're well," was the best he could answer.

She laughed.

"Oh, there's never anything the matter with me either in health, temper or estate. Well, when are you going to drop this awfully silly game of hide-and-seek, in which nobody appears to be seeking and you only appear to be hiding."

"I beg your pardon, I haven't made up my mind to take anybody into my confidence."

"Then you'd better put your mind out to be made up, it's high time, and give your confidence to anybody who'll accept it. You appear to think everything happens of itself. The only things that do are those that had better not happen at all, railway accidents, impromptu speeches, sudden deaths, love marriages and spoilt dresses. Do you know, I always thought you'd rather a hankering after going back to Lady Sally." He had nothing to say. "I suppose because you knew you couldn't. Anyhow you can't now. You'll have to hurry up, or you'll be too late to get a present in and receive an invitation to the wedding breakfast."

She unrolled the paper in her hand. It proved to be a copy of that week's *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat.* She found the right page and put it into his unwilling hand. His unwilling eye just caught the words "Lady Sally Sallis—*authoritatively* announce—engagement." His unwilling will refused to take him further. The paper fell from his hand, and in falling separated and lay on the ground in two.

"Everybody has known it for ever so long," she said, "though there's been no *authoritative* announcement. It's plain enough why she let it appear first in this common paper."

She assumed that she was asked the question though his lips were dumb.

"Just to get your address out of them; yours and your Vitella's. Oh, you may be quite sure it's correct. So there's an end of the mystery, if there ever was one, of her taking your jilting of her sitting down."

She picked up one of the papers, but failed to draw his attention to Vitella's paragraph. The paper fell again to the ground. So long as that woman's eyes were upon him he would keep himself from any precise measurement of what he had lost.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked.

"With your permission, return to my digging."

"Oh, don't let me keep you if you've anything so important as that. Well, if you've any message for her I shall probably be seeing her shortly."

The prick of her taunt only helped him to see the more quickly and clearly that no change in his over-night decision was permissible.

"Thank you, I have a message; but I shall take it myself."

"Well, 'better late than never,' they say. You'll at least have a chance of trying if the proverb's true. I reckon it was made before watches were. But even in those benighted days one would think they'd *feel* some sort of difference, if only with the skin, between December and June."

"Quite right; it would be impertinent to attempt now what should have been done in June. But December has duties of its own."

His resolution withstood the shock of her sarcasm so easily that it seemed to have gained by it.

"You appear to have grown a bit since I saw you last. But that digging of yours? Though I hope it's not six months overdue. When you come up to town don't forget to call on me. Awfully rough walking, isn't it? Good-morning."

She put in his hand her card as well as her glove, and then returned across the fallow on the whole satisfied with her success, if only because a state of dissatisfaction was foreign to her character. This much at least was plain to her, that Lord Beiley was about to break through the inertia in which he had been so long involved.

CHAPTER XL

UNDER THE ROSE

MR. PULLEN came in to tea with two numbers of the *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat* in his hand.

"I found 'em," he said, "in the Far-Nigh Cluss. I wonder who was the busy sower of 'em. Thank the Lord twaddle and gossip and scandal and malice don't seed until yer first take them into your heart; otherwise the scattering abroad of these two parcels of devil's rammel ud be enoo to make the whole parish sny [1] with a worse weed than ever was thistle or devil's-gut. Here, Vitie, fire-back 'em."

The reminder recalled the shame to the girl's cheeks.

"I'll never buy another copy," she said impetuously.

"Surely they aren't of your buying?"

"These aren't, but I have bought them, often. I'll never buy any more though, and I'll burn all I've got."

"If it's the *Twopence Ha'penny,*" said Mrs. Pullen, "it's not all so bad. Vitie got very good receipts out of it for sore throats and iron-mould."

"That bit of good in a bad thing," said her husband, "is the worst thing in't; it's the bait; yer can't catch anything with mere poison. Why do yer withhold your hand, lass?"

For on the very hearth-stone Vitie's impetuosity had been stayed from the promised destruction. She had caught sight of Vitella's query and the editorial answer thickly and trebly pencil-marked on the open page of one of the papers that she was holding out to the flames.

[1] Swarm.

The one she dropped, the other she gathered to her again; with it in her hand she crossed the room and not heeding her father's question went out by the yard door.

"I'm afeared the world's over much to the lass," said Pullen.

"Nay," said his wife, "I'm sure she's beginning to take a deal of interest in the choir."

"May-be; I'm glad on't; but psalms and hymns and spiritual songs aren't enoo of themselves to save the soul of a tomtit, even with that admixture of bonnets, giggling and organ which makes up a first-rate choir."

Meanwhile Vitie hastily making the round of the yard found Lord Beiley in the stable rubbing Vi'let down with a wisp of straw. Joe and the boy were milking in the neighbouring hovel, whence their disconnected utterances could now and again be heard or half-heard; which made her come nearer than she would have done and drop her voice to the confidential level.

"I want to speak to you," she said in a tremor of excitement.

He looked up and was struck with the girl's beauty. Either his eyes had been opened, or that dim doorstead midway between the outer twilight severely grey and the interior dusk added more than it took from her flushed face and excited eyes.

"I want to know, I must know, just how much you've read of this."

She held out the *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat* so that he could read its title.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I must. Don't you know why? Why did she bring it here?"

"The lady who asked you to announce her under a certain name?"

"Yes."

"It is a name to which she has no title. In justice to the proper owner you ought to know so much."

"To'd me his own sen," said Tom Morley.

The girl still held out the news-sheet. Beiley's ex-

planation, important as it appeared to him, did not hold her attention.

"I can't bear myself until I know."

Beiley felt as we do when the keen air blows upon a part of the body which we are wont to keep covered, but he pitied the girl's distress, he hesitated over the terms of refusal. A tear formed in each of her eyes, swelled the lids, glimmered through the lashes, fell in one big drop down each hot cheek. You see he could not escape; he was within and she held the doorway. Joe Biddle said quite audibly, "Set yer foot, yo slut;" and then it was so quiet next door that they could hear the milk plopping into the buckets.

Beiley took the periodical from the girl's hand, and with much repugnance turned its leaves from the initial *On dit,* in which gentlemen and ladies flashed their titles, their brilliants and their lapses, to the oddments about ecclesiastical vestures, furniture polish, fruit salads, care of the teeth, neglect of the mind and beetles. She trembled and her flushed face paled while he glanced over the page headed "Under the Rose"; but that like all the others he passed without sign and finally returned the paper to her, saying:

"It isn't there at all."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

Vitie flew back into the house. He turned again to his wisping, glad to have been so let off. He let his thoughts rest idly upon Tom Morley's words which came through the boarded partition: "Weighed two pound an' a hafe." But in less than a minute Vitie had returned with the other number of the *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat.*

"Is it in this?" she said.

His repugnance was greater, his pity had cooled.

"I must ask you please to accept my assurance that it was nothing in the remotest degree connected with yourself."

He took up a brush and stooped to the mare's heavy fetlock.

"There's not a deal in't ayther road," said Joe Biddle.

Vitie still held the paper out.

"I shall never feel certain," she said, "never, unless I see just what it was."

"You appear to doubt my word."

"No, no, it isn't that, it isn't that at all; it's—I haven't had time to think what it is."

He felt the paper to be pressed upon him though it was held forth to so modest an extent; he took it, reluctantly found the proper page. What he had to admit seemed more intolerable in small capitals and long primer than in all the hyperbole of imagination. He gave her back the paper, saying:

"After what I've said I think you've no right to ask me."

"I know I've no right," she said, and her voice faltered on the word which should have received the stress.

"I've seed a many on 'em a'ready," said Tom Morley.

"Shouldn't wunner," said Joe Biddle.

Vitie did not go quite away, she took a step or two backward, then lingered disconsolately by the corner. Beiley appeared to be entirely occupied with his brush and Vi'let's flowing tail; but he could see the one half of her person, and especially he could see the news-sheet that hung so slackly from her hand. Her face, which he could not see, all the more appealed to him. He went out to her and said:

"I beg pardon for keeping you waiting."

He took the paper and pointed out the passage in question.

"Was that all?" she asked.

"Quite all."

"Me an' two'r three others," said Joe.

The abatement of her distress enabled her to see and understand more clearly. The letter-press before her undimmed eyes began to have a meaning for her, she comprehended something of its bearing upon the man before her; her selfishness was transformed into sympathy.

"I believe she's the lady who came here yesterday," she said. "I believe she came to see you, my lord." The man's concealment did not entirely conceal. Her self-pity had made the breach by which rushed in a larger pity. "I didn't know her name, but I've been wishing she'd call again ever since."

She burst into tears, and in her tears were dissolved the vainer personal elements of that girlish romance.

"Why are you crying?" said he, perplexed and greatly disconcerted.

"I don't know. Because I can't help. I'm so sorry."

"For me? I'm not worth it. For her? She doesn't need it."

"For both of you, I think. She was so nice. And you, my lord——"

"Thompson, if you please. She doesn't need it, I say; she's better off. And what's better for her is better than the best for me."

Vitie dried her tears but shook her head.

"When shall you be going?"

"To-night if I may."

She gave a little gasp. She knew he must go, but it was so soon!

"Then I'll say good-bye, for if I shouldn't see you again."

She turned and ran back into the house so hastily that his answering good-bye may or may not have reached her ear.

"Allus tas'es so funny loike," said Tom Morley.

When he entered the room the farmer had just sat down to his tea, a substantial meal which would also serve him for supper. Mrs. Pullen stood over the table pouring out his drink. Through the open door Addie could be seen frying potatoes at the kitchen fire, with a keen ear despite appearances for all that was said.

"Is there anything more that I can do?" said Beiley.

"Yes, come and get yer tea down," answered the farmer.

"I'd sooner finish off first."

"Yer may, if yer will, just give the Polly cow her bean-mash."

"I've done that."

"Then yer may, if yer like, pulp a few turnips for the morning."

"I've done that."

"Sit down then to yer tea, if yer please."

"Things have so happened that I find it necessary to leave you sooner than I'd intended."

"I saw there was summat. Well, I'm sorry; latterly I've begun to see the shapings of a farmer in yer. When were yer thinking of going?"

"As soon as possible without inconveniencing you."

"Oh, for that matter the taters, mangolds and swedes are pied up, the fallers are ploughed, the wheat's sowed, the colt's broken in, the hedging and ditching's well begun; it wouldn't hurt me if yer was to go this moment."

"Thank you." Beiley looked at his Waterbury watch. "If I start at once I can just catch the six-twenty at Loddingham."

"Man alive!" exclaimed Mrs. Pullen, coming in from the kitchen with the smoking potatoes. "It's enough to take one's breath."

"Nay, nay," said her husband, "yer must have bite and sup before yer go. Neither worldly nor spiritual work ever went the better on an empty stomach; for that animal part of us is so craving and masterful that it won't cease teasing and demanding while it's unsatisfied."

"I can get something at Leicester."

Beiley hastily washed hands and face at the sink, and towelled them with the rough jack-towel which hung on the door.

"I don't know," said the housewife, "as I shall be content to let yer go hungry away."

"If you will be so kind. And really I'm not hungry."

"Then you're worse."

He looked again at his watch.

"If I had five minutes to spare I would sooner spend it in thanking you, Mr. Pullen, Mrs. Pullen, for your great kindness to me and forbearance with me."

"Pugh! Pugh! don't talk on't," said the farmer. "I can't think what Vi'let'll do without yer."

"We don't want yer thanks," said Mrs. Pullen, "we only want yer to act reasonable."

"There's something owing to you and the laundress," said Beiley.

Mrs. Pullen glanced at the coins which he laid on the table.

"It won't amount to anything like that, anyhow."

"Please put the change on the collection-plate next Sunday. Tartar's hoofs want oiling and stopping."

He shook hands with them both.

Said Mrs. Pullen: "You're not to think but what I'm offended."

Said the farmer solemnly: "May you have a prosperous journey by the will of God."

"Thank you, thank you."

He was already on the road when Mrs. Pullen went to the door and shouted after him:

"We've clean forgot your things. Where shall we send 'em?"

"Please give the leggings to Joe, the overcoats to Tom and the rest to Mrs. Brewster."

"If that don't cap everything I ever heard!" she said to her husband.

"And he's gone too without saying good-bye to Vitie! Where is the lass?"

Mrs. Pullen went to the stair-foot and called up. At the second time of calling Vitie answered.

"Yes, mother?"

"What are yer doing up there?"

"Nothing particular."

Whether it were the constraint of the girl's voice or the unusual excitation of her own mind, a thought came to Mrs. Pullen which she had not had before.

"It's my belief he has said good-bye to her."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the farmer.

"Then yer mustn't wonder neither if when she comes down her eyes is red with crying."

"Yer don't say so?"

"But I do say so. She's always been very partic'lar he should have a second-best knife and fork."

"Poor little lass! Who'd have thought it? Poor little Vitie! Let's see, how old is she?"

"Going of nineteen."

The father stayed his knife and fork while his thoughts made a tangle of his hopes and fears, his memories and his prophecies of the to-come.

"It don't seem a day hardly since she used to call marmilade baa-lamb-lade."

"I wonder whether she knows who he is."

"If we think she does it'll be a main good reason for not asking her."

Presently Mrs. Pullen went again and called at the stair-foot.

"Vitie! I won't have yer stopping up there catching yer death of cold no longer."

After a little delay she came down; and though she had carefully bathed her eyes they revealed to scrutiny the red traces of recent tears. Said the father:

"How should yer like to drive with me to Nottingham to-morrow, lass, and walk down the Row and look in the bonnet-shop winders?"

"I don't mind if I do, dada," she answered; and at the same moment a purpose was born in her brain which took something from the lackadaisical droop of her shoulders.

The feeling with which she regarded Beiley had been mainly a curiosity, though gilded with the romancing of a virgin ignorance. Her tears, so far as they fell for herself, were more on account of the humiliation than the loss; a humiliation immediately caused by Miss Percival's discovery, but which owned something also to the shock of a self-discovery. It had become clear to her with distressing suddenness and clearness, that in

consulting the oracle of the twaddle mart she had acted under the promptings of a childish folly; the consciousness of which was a sign of the woman ripening within her.

Meanwhile Beiley was speeding on his three-mile walk to the station with a purpose that had been six months in the making. He might have doubted whether the announcement of the engagement were veracious but for the plausibility of Miss Percival's explanation; though why Lady Sally should want his address he could invent no satisfactory reason. He kept congratulating himself that he had delayed his departure until after Miss Percival's visit. Thus much at any rate he appeared to have gained thereby; that the mockery of his delusions was at an end; the torture of hope, the agony of desire, which did little more than keep despair awake, were at an end. Out of all that whirl of passions which had made his brain reel, he was going to the meeting with but one motive, shame, and but one emotion, fear; a simplification whereby at least his fleshly part had gained in repose, his intellectual in consistency and his moral in dignity. But while his thoughts went backwards and forwards his feet moved on; he reached the station in good time and took his seat in the train. His feet rested but not his thoughts. The full moon was yet low in the east, and through the smoke-trail of the heavily-stoked engine its light flashed in and out with the effect almost terrible of an incessant lightning, almost grotesque of a face playing peep-bo with him; symbol of the dubious aspect of the enterprise which he had in hand.

CHAPTER XLI

AT LAST

It was again but a bleak black day, the next, and every now and then the forbidding clouds let dribble a few pellets of frozen snow; but Vitie dressed herself with great niceness and in her best clothes for the drive to Nottingham, for which she was sharply reproved by her mother.

"I should have thought your second-best frock and your brown felt ud have been good enough to ride there with a sheep and back with a pig, good enough and to spare."

"Let the lass be," said her father; "I like her to look eyeable when she goes to the big town."

But Vitie had not dressed either for the sheep or the pig, though she did not say so. When her father, who drove straight to the cattle-market, parted company with her in Arkwright Street, instead of filling the time between then and dinner with shopping and sight-seeing, she took the tram for Monkton and walked the remaining mile and a half to Sheraton Towers. It was a bold undertaking for her rustic inexperience, but the quicker beating of her heart, which originated in the disorder of her nerves, did not end there; it gave colour to her courage and stimulus to her resolution. She did not once stop on the way, though her thoughts often looked back. The greatest trial from first to last was to mount those great stone steps, to stand before the baronial portal, to ring, to wait, to maintain the encounter with the liveried serving-man. Everything else was easy after that, even to be newly come into Lady

Sally's presence; for Lady Sally knew her at once, shook hands with her, bade her be seated and asked if she had had a pleasant drive; the rest came inevitably. There was a little slight dark-haired child sitting in a window-seat and quietly turning the pages of an illustrated fairy-tale book.

"I didn't come for the drive—altogether."

The "altogether" was such an involuntary snatch-back at delay as one makes who half repents of his plunge when in mid-air between safe bank and stream of unknown depth.

"What can I do for you?"

But she had already felt the cold water chin-high; now with one irrepressible gasp recovering breath and courage she struck out.

"My lady, I want you not to be angry. I know I oughtn't to interfere."

"No, you don't, or you wouldn't do it. Go on."

"You know who I mean, my lady. He's gone away."

"Where has he gone?"

"I don't know, my lady."

"Why did he go?"

"I think I know that, my lady. He'd seen something in a paper."

"What paper?"

"The *Twopence Ha'penny Aristocrat*." Vitie's face flushed at the bare name. "About you."

"You are Vitella?"

Vitie bit her lip, but the tears of mortification could not be kept back.

"Don't cry, dear. If you like him for his good qualities, there's nothing to be ashamed of in that. If I'd always done so this would never have happened."

The child left her book in the window and came and stood before them, her eyes gravely putting the question to both speaker and listener. Vitie put away her handkerchief.

"I hope it isn't true, my lady. Excuse me, my lady."

"It is true."

"Then I'm sorry for him." Vitie rose, she felt that her mission was ended. "And for you too, my lady."

"But you are given to understand that I'm satisfied."

Vitie was rose-red, but she faced the lady.

"I'm sure the other one isn't anything like so nice."

"It *is* Jack," said the child as though in answer to her own thoughts; and Lady Sally laughed.

Vitie meanwhile had been getting nearer the door.

"Won't you stay," said the lady, "and take a little luncheon with Bertha and me?"

"Thank you, my lady, I've got to be in Wheeler Gate at one o'clock to have dinner with dada. If I'm late he'll think I'm lost."

"How do you go?"

"Walk as far as the trams."

"You can't do it in anything like the time; it's five and twenty to already. Bertha and I must drive you there in the dogcart."

Vitie would have declined but was not listened to. In ten minutes she and Lady Sally with Bertha between them were speeding towards Nottingham behind a fast-trotting bay, which went with so good a will that the whip was a mere ornament to the equipage. They were nearly three miles on their way and were rolling along between a leafy suburb and a canal, when Lady Sally said:

"Who told him?"

"A dressed-up lady who came the day after you did."

"Plump and dark?"

"Yes, and with eyes that took everything in."

The only appearance of hurry was in the wild flutter of Bertha's hair, which seemed ever afraid of being left behind but never was; yet they bowled into Wheeler Gate just as the Exchange clock was chiming the preface to its monosyllabic announcement of the hour.

By three o'clock Beiley stood within the doors of

Sheraton Towers. Hitherto his thoughts had been forcibly concentrated upon the next thing; the phrasing of a telegram, the chipping of an egg, the question of tea or coffee, the consultation of time-tables, the selection of a coat, the trimming of finger-nails, the ordering of a cab, the counting of change, the ringing of a bell. Now the intermediate was shorn away before him, the end of all those preparations was in sight. The men's voices, footman's or butler's, sounded uncertainly in his ears. He hardly heard a child's delighted cry from the stairs, did not recognize the flushed little face peeping through the marble balustrades, was surprised to find two of his fingers seized each of them by a little hand, Bertha's.

"Have you come to see me?" she said.

"I wish I had."

"Oh, so do I. But p'raps you've come to see Sally?"

"Yes."

"Oh well, that's all the same; for we're such great friends, Sally and Dolly and me, that it *is* all the same, you know." The little voice dropped to the confidential. "I think Sally has been expecting you. She didn't *say* so, but her face—one's face does, you know. She told me I might come out here with Dolly if I liked, and show her the pictures and count how many persons went in and out by the big door, but Dolly was asleep, the darling, so I came alone. There have been eleven persons, reckoning a big one for the earl and a little one for the dog. That's without you; I quite forgot to count you. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit."

"But come with me. There are—oh, such a lot of doors! but I know just where she is."

How sweet it was to him to feel that gentle drawing by two fingers delivering him out of the custody of the men-servants, whose respectful impassiveness was intolerable to him!

They passed in to Lady Sally's presence. As she gave the ordinary greeting there was neither flush nor

pallor on her face, neither fluster nor emotion in her voice. While Beiley stood the child had been coming forward, but looking up saw on his face the picture of a tragedy. With intuitive tact she went quietly out and shut the door. They were alone together without one dab of disguise, one rag of concealment. Affright, shame, ay, even a tempestuous inexplicable rapture intermingled in one agony, physical as well as mental. Lady Sally bade him be seated and said:

"Please begin at the beginning."

Bertha came upon Lord and Lady Hexgrove sitting in the south drawing-room together with the Honourable Mrs. Cardus, Lady Hexgrove's close friend, who was remarkable alike for fleshly weight and lightness of disposition. Lady Hexgrove was saying for the twentieth time in equivalent words:

"Are you quite sure we are doing right?"

"Quite sure," answered the earl; "we are doing nothing."

"Nothing!" exclaimed Mrs. Cardus. "You and I carry weight. Do you call coal-heaving nothing?"

"But," said Lady Hexgrove, "haven't we allowed her to expose herself to a very considerable annoyance?"

"I'm convinced that we've allowed nothing but what we either ought not to refuse or could not."

Said Mrs. Cardus: "Then you don't know whether you don't because you won't or won't because you don't? And you call that a conviction? I'm equally convinced that this tooth of mine which waggles both to the right and to the left, to the front and to the rear, is a firm sound tooth, and anybody who says 'Have it out' is an enemy of ratiocination and of me."

"I'm not at all satisfied," said her ladyship, "that we're doing the proper thing."

"There is somebody within the arrangement," said the earl, "who is even more dissatisfied than yourself."

"I hasten to agree with you there," said Mrs. Cardus. "I wouldn't wear that young man's shoes for the next few minutes for a trifle."

"Jack's? Because they'd nip?" said Bertha.

"Excruciatingly."

"But they aren't shoes, they're very nice shiny boots."

"When you've corns boots and shoes are one."

"One boot or one shoe?"

"One agony."

"What a funny word!"

"Yes, dear; and there's a great deal of similar fun in life besides what we get out of boots and shoes."

"My shoes aren't at all funny. But then, you see, my nicest shoes are Sunday shoes. They're glacé. Why do you pinch my ear?"

"As a charm, little one, against your shoes ever pinching you."

"I should like to be perfectly sure," said Lady Hexgrove, "that we are not doing wrong."

Meanwhile Beiley had begun at the beginning, and drawn on by Lady Sally's frequent questions had only ended at the end, having omitted nothing of importance but that miserable mis-spending of her half-crown. Only three or four of her questions need be recorded. She asked him what was his chief thought when he awoke to being too late for the wedding.

"That you had had a very fortunate escape," he answered.

"Perhaps I had. But what of yourself?"

"I felt glad," he answered with an enforced candour, "that I could never go back, do what I had done, be what I had been."

"I hope you still rejoice in that feeling of perfect freedom."

"Only partly."

She asked him in its proper place why he did not leave England immediately after seeing Fasson at Leicester.

"I knew I must see you first."

She asked what had become of Jack the tramp.

"He has gone away, leaving this message: 'I never

could abear to walk a mile wivout a bend in it an' they wants me to lead a straight life. Tell 'em, if they'll find the steam-roller an' carry me there, I'll lay myself down an' be straightened out proper; an' a bloomin' sight less fag.' "

Again at the conclusion of his narrative she said:

"You say that you could see the Towers from a certain point on the farm. Had you ever to go that way again?"

"Yes."

"Often?"

"Yes."

"Thank you; it has been even more interesting than I expected. I owe you some return. Come and see our wedding-presents."

Lord Beiley uprose; he had refused the invitation once, he could not refuse again. Though somewhat sudden, it was what he apprehended, knew. It was moreover no possible concern of his, except in so far as it concerned her happiness—her happiness which he was glad to think he could thenceforth neither add to nor take from. Only to hear it from her mouth did for the moment make more than the due volume of sound in his ears, did for the moment cause sensations nearer the centre of his being than was either proper or reasonable. He knew that and made such haste as he might, she giving him ample time, to express himself in opposition to his feelings.

"It wouldn't be decent of me to offer congratulations upon what you've gained; but I think I might be allowed to do so upon what you've missed."

"Thank you, I'll accept both. Come; I believe you know the way."

He knew the way, knew the room; but the glittering, the many-coloured objects before him, the silver and gold and precious stones, the rare china and iridescent glass, the ivory yellow with age, the books both new and old, famous or remarkably obscure, the works of burin, needle and brush, the oriental silks, shawls and

carpets, the heaped furs of many countries, the ancestral lace, the carven wood fragrant with its own preciousness, the rarities, the oddities and costly commonnesses, the tokens of affection modestly sufficient, the blatant demonstrations of pride and snobbishness, he did not know, though he had seen many of them before. As under her guidance he made the round of the room there was a dimness before his eyes, not of tears, they were quite dry, but of the want of tears. He stopped at last with a bound into recognition before the insignia of a viscountess, his own gift. His start from that numb sufferance into a present suffering, a living agony, drew from her a sudden exclamation:

"What's the matter, Jack?"

He was taken altogether unawares, he could not restrain it—that one sob, a chest-upheaval, dry of tears.

"Don't do that again," she said quickly; "it sounded horrible."

He already had his breath again and half his wits. He recognized the gift next to his own, her father's, a silver chalice, priceless Florentine work; and the next, an eye-glass with a gold handle gem-mounted from Aunt Aclom; and the next, a heap of Ruskin all morocco and gold; and the next and—and in short many others as far as he could see. He found a difficulty in retaining the quantum of wits he had recovered. He felt Lady Sally's hand upon his own. The madness which comes of mixing wines is nothing to that excited by an inrush of wild hopes among settled despairs.

"I beg your pardon," he gasped; "if you'll excuse me I'll——"

He was going, she stood in his way, fronting him. The words burst forth which he had so advisedly repressed.

"Forgive me, Sally!"

"I do forgive you, Jack."

"I'm under no delusion; I don't pretend—I know that I never could under any circumstances have made the slightest amends."

"Yes, you shall keep your beard; it suits you."

She offered her hand; her eyes were kind.

"Lady Sally——"

"Lord Jack——"

He could not separate what her eyes said from what her voice.

"What you say, Sally, is impossible."

"Why?"

He could not bring to utterance what was in his thoughts; but it would appear there was a sudden enlightening of her ladyship's mind, telepathic, intuitive, casual, what you will.

"Oh, perhaps you're thinking of 'one of the richest and handsomest bachelors in the peerage'?"

Beiley hung his head. Lady Sally drew him by the arm and turned him right about.

"Look up, Jack."

He looked up and found himself facing a large pier-glass wherein both his own figure and Lady Sally's were reflected full-length. But his hope had all the timidity and inexperience of a new-born thing; he looked round on her incredulously. She smiled, a hope-fostering smile, and said:

"The gossip-mongers spoke the truth for once."

She put out her left hand which she had hitherto kept in reserve, and she saw his eyes fasten on the engagement ring which it still bore.

"Yes," she said, "and I should miss it, for it's a very pretty ring. Still if you have any other use for it——"

"But the shame, Sally, the indelible shame!"

"We'll face it together."

"Your father and mother, your friends, the world!"

"Mayn't I come in?"

It was Bertha's plaintive high-pitched pipe behind the door.

"Half a minute, dear. You allow me to keep it?"

He had never in his life felt so disinclined to say no, so incapable of saying yes.

"Then I will make you a present of one in return."

She took his hand in hers and quickly slipped on the proper finger the ruby ring which he had given to Bertha. There was the swift inexpressible lightning-interchange of lovers' looks, the spontaneous mutual embrace.

"You may come in, dear," cried Lady Sally, and the child bounded into the room. "Behold the world! Now let us go and face my father and mother."

"May I go with you, Jack and Sally?" said Bertha.

"Certainly, dear," said Lady Sally for both.

"What a fool I've been!" said Beiley.

"I mustn't contradict you; it wouldn't be nice."

THE END

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